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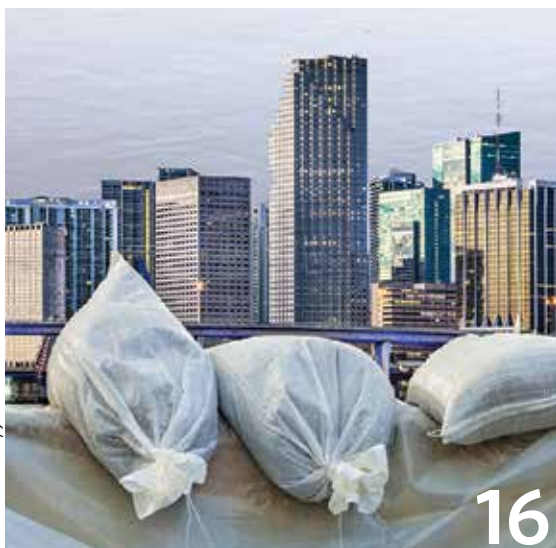
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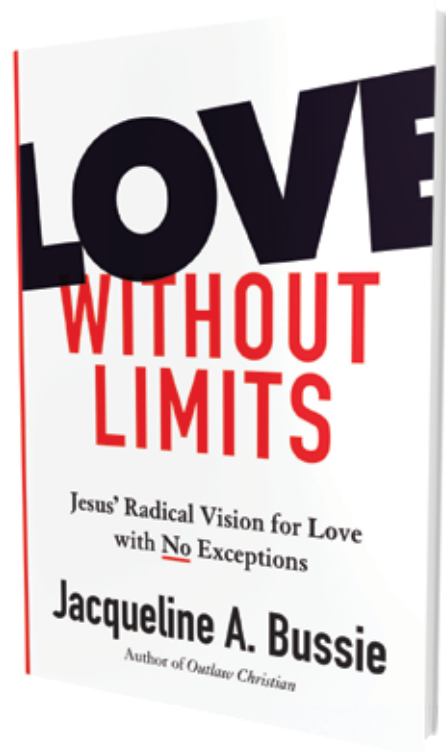
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“

Bussie's words reminded me of how vast and expansive Christ was (is)—and that **CHRISTIAN LOVE SHOOK THE EARTH** precisely because it extends to every single person without exception.”

—Jessica Mesman Griffith, author of *Love and Salt*

EARLIER THIS YEAR, we lost theologian James H. Cone. “Yes, he was a world historical figure in contemporary theology, no doubt about that,” said professor Cornel West at Cone’s funeral, “a towering prophetic figure engaging in his mighty critiques and indictments of contemporary Christendom from the vantage point of the least of these ... But oh,” West added. “I think he would want us to view him through the lens of the cross—the blood at the foot of that cross.”

More than any other theologian, Cone taught us that we cannot divorce the gospel—Jesus’ suffering and redemption—from the history of violence against black people in the U.S. “Until we can see the cross and the lynching tree together, until we can identify Christ with a ‘recrucified’ black body hanging from a lynching tree, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America,” wrote Cone in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, “and no deliverance from the

brutal legacy of slavery and white supremacy.”

The same week Cone died, the Equal Justice Initiative opened the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Ala., the nation’s first memorial dedicated to the more than 4,400 victims of racial violence, including lynching, between 1877 and 1950. “The new museum and memorial ... create space for mourning the untended bodies of loved ones whose killings were covered by dreadful silence,” writes Josina Guess in “A Grief Deferred.” “For every lynching there was a ripple effect of thousands of African-American people uprooted and forced to make a new life on different soil—or more often, concrete—and not allowed full expression of their grief.”



Theologian
James H. Cone

Charlotte Raymond

This issue bears evidence of those ripples. For Guess, visiting the museum and monument was a way to help her children “take an unflinching look at our racist past and present, and to give them courage to walk the unfinished path toward justice.” For columnist Lisa Sharon Harper, the museum prompted a new meditation on what allowed generations

of white folks to “suppress their own feelings of sympathy and empathy.” And for Jemar Tisby, who writes about the overlooked role of district attorneys in criminal justice, the museum succeeds in drawing “a direct line from past years of slavery to the mass incarceration of the present.” These stories share a holy grief, part of the painfully slow work of setting captives free. ■

Letters

Racist Neglect

Hurricane Maria revealed not only colonialism in Puerto Rico, as Alexandra Rosado-Román described in “What Hurricane María Revealed” (May 2018), but the racist neglect of an isolated black population in the U.S. Virgin Islands, likewise impacted but rarely mentioned in the media. Like the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, conditions were worse for that group of U.S. citizens than for Puerto Ricans or mainland Americans even before the storm. Let us also help them in their recovery.

Richard Gillum
Silver Spring, Maryland

Worship and Education

I am currently using the excellent “Reclaiming Jesus” statement mentioned in “Which Jesus Do We Serve?” (Jim Wallis, June 2018) in worship. We are a small church, so worship and education go hand in hand. Prior to using the Reclaiming Jesus confession, we explored the Theological Declaration of Barmen. Each Sunday, we share a section of “We Believe” and “Therefore We Reject.” We have additional

Hurricane Maria revealed not only colonialism, but also racist neglect.

information about both statements in the bulletin and in our weekly email newsletter, with a link to the entire statement and the background information on why it was written. Thank you!

Scott Marrese-Wheeler
McFarland, Wisconsin

An Omission

“Reclaiming Jesus” is a good statement (“Which Jesus Do We Serve?”) with one omission: the affirmation of other spiritual paths—of our community and common bonds with Muslims, Jews, and others—and a rejection of Christian exclusivism that demonizes and delegitimizes non-Christian religions. This exclusivism is being affirmed in practice by the White House. With that caveat, as a former staff member of the National Council of Churches, I am very glad that you are promoting this.

Dave Brown
Tacoma, Washington

Teaching Trinity

While my 16-year-old school students explained the concept of the Trinity to our “Studies of Religion” class, I felt thankful that we live in more tolerant days than that of the Council of Chalcedon of the fifth century, lest we all be tried for heresy. I then read Wil Gafney’s reflection for Trinity Sunday (“Rumors of Life,” May 2018). She expressed so well what I really wanted my students to learn: how to name God rather than number God, to know God rather than explain God. Thank you, Wil Gafney, for such a brief, but wonderful, reflection.

Jonathan Noble
Windermere Park, New South Wales, Australia

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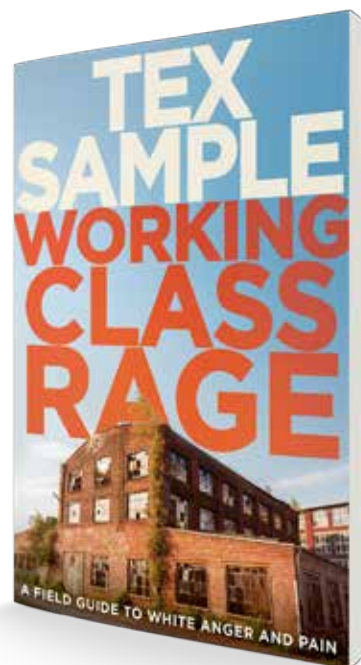
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COMING SOON

WORKING CLASS RAGE

The struggles of working class Americans have made this group a powerful influence on the political and social climate of our country. Tex Sample drills deep into the realities of people whose suffering and anger is denied, ignored, or misunderstood.



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BY JIM WALLIS

The Scandal of Voter Suppression



IN 2016, VOTERS faced extensive efforts to make voting more difficult, particularly for people of color and those who are poor. These efforts at voter suppression occurred as a result of GOP gains in governors' races and state legislatures while Barack Obama was president—and also as a result of the Supreme Court gutting a key provision of the Voting Rights Act in 2013.

Between those two factors, 23 states—including some key battlegrounds in the presidential election—had new voter restrictions in place for the 2016 election. Examples include laws that eliminated polling places or moved them to less accessible locations, reduced polling hours, tightened voter-ID requirements, “purged” voter rolls, and reduced early voting and Sunday voting, which are popular among minority voters in certain regions.

As we approach the 2018 mid-

exercise the right to vote.

In-person voter fraud is vanishingly rare, to the tune of only 31 documented cases out of 1 billion ballots cast between 2000 and 2014. To put it another way, the odds that any given person will attempt in-person voter fraud are something like 1 in 32 million, significantly lower than the odds of being struck by lightning. Twice.

Stricter ID requirements and other measures claimed to combat “voter fraud” are actually efforts to suppress the vote of certain people. As Christians living in a representative democracy, we should champion the right of all people to participate in the act of self-government by exercising their right to vote, regardless of who they vote for.

Because protecting voters is integral to creating the just society our faith calls us to seek, Sojourners has long worked with other faith groups, such as the National African

American Clergy Network, as well as groups of legal professionals, such as the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, to bring lawyers and clergy together for discussion and

action centered on protecting vulnerable voters. This year, we are expanding our involvement in this area through a new “Lawyers and Collars” initiative that will involve lawyers and clergy working together in important and innovative ways.

There is symbolic power in clergy, wearing their clerical collars, showing up alongside lawyers on Election Day to offer protection to voters who may be targeted for suppression or intimidation, and that work will continue and expand this November at polling places across the country.

However, there is also much that can be done—and needs to be

done—well before Election Day. For example, in 24 states the chief election official is an elected secretary of state. The secretary of state has broad powers over how elections are administered and can make it easier or more difficult for voters to exercise their franchise. Because these are mostly elected officials, they must respond to public pressure from constituents if they want to keep their jobs—which is why we plan to have lawyers and clergy in a number of states work with the secretary of state's office to ensure voters are protected, and in some cases let officials know that we're watching them.

Another way we can stand for vulnerable people is to vote ourselves—in elections at every level of government and on ballot initiatives. This fall, for example, an initiative on the ballot in Florida would return the right to vote to more than a million people with felony convictions, many of whom committed relatively minor, nonviolent drug crimes, and all of whom have paid their debt to society. Several states have passed measures to make it easier to register to vote, and others have introduced legislation to do so that so far lacks sufficient support. Electing state legislators, governors, and secretaries of state who support voting rights is something we all can do by exercising our own right to vote.

In a representative democracy, the right to vote is one of the most fundamental a person can have, and a prerequisite for retaining a host of other rights and protections. We must protect this most basic of rights for all our brothers and sisters, and that work must start well before any ballots are cast. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

We have a clear Christian mandate to ensure that society's most vulnerable can exercise the right to vote.

terms, we need to protect the right to vote for citizens of all races, economic levels, and political persuasions. This is an *imago dei* issue: If we believe that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), then efforts to prevent some of God's children from exercising their franchise must be opposed as a matter of fidelity to our faith. It's also a Matthew 25 issue: If we believe that how we treat people living in poverty and those who have been caught up in the system of mass incarceration is how we treat Christ himself, then we have a clear Christian mandate to ensure that society's most vulnerable can



People wait to receive free medical care at the Remote Area Medical clinic in Gray, Tenn.

Remote Area Medical

By Simone Campbell and Fran Quigley

You've Got a Right to a Healthy Life

Health care is a bad match for a market-oriented approach, so faith traditions are demanding universal health coverage.

IN MINNESOTA, Alec Smith was unable to afford either health insurance premiums or the insulin needed to treat his Type 1 diabetes, despite working full time. He died last year from diabetic ketoacidosis, at age 26. Other young Americans with diabetes have suffered the same fate.

David Bridges of Indiana has health insurance through his job, but a high deductible means he has to pay for his multiple prescriptions out of pocket. One of those prescriptions alone costs \$700 a month. He maxes out credit cards to buy what medicine he can, yet still has to skip doses.

These stories represent the status quo of U.S. health care, even with the preservation of the Affordable Care Act. In responding to such gaps, the faith community has traditionally turned to the direct provision of charity health care, a generous hallmark of our traditions for generations. But we cannot stop there.

Front-line charity health-care providers are the first to acknowledge the truth

in the words of peace and civil rights activist William Sloane Coffin. "Human nature, as every Bible reader knows, is sinful, and therefore the virtue of the few will never compensate for the inertia of the many," Coffin said. "Charity, yes always; but never as a substitute for justice."

When it comes to health care, there is no question about how we define justice. All major religious traditions embrace a clear responsibility to provide for the poor

"Charity, yes always; but never as a substitute for justice."

and the sick. Early church writers often referred to Jesus as the "Great Physician," and there are dozens of New Testament references to Jesus healing the sick. His healing acts honored the multiple Hebrew scripture demands to provide care, including calls to action such as "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (Deuteronomy 15:11, see also

Proverbs 31:9, Isaiah 1:17). The Islamic mandate to care for the struggling poor led to history's first structured charity hospitals. Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian traditions dating back to 400 B.C.E. show that similar treatment was provided.

That legacy provides us with an important lesson: When it comes to health care, we are compelled to pursue a communal solution. Government acting in our names protects our other human rights through law enforcement, emergency services, judicial systems, and infrastructure. So too must government provide the foundation of a morally defensible health-care system.

Our health-care system needs to step away from treating health care as a commodity ripe for sale at the highest possible prices. Health care is a bad match for the market-oriented approach. "Consumers" are often ill, desperate, and unable to comparison shop or walk away from the "transaction." Even some economic conservatives, who champion the power of

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markets in other settings, admit those same markets do not work well for health care.

Nearly every other nation that possesses resources similar to the U.S. guarantees universal health coverage, which includes improved access to care and financial protection. Those nations have committed to health as a human right. Many have embraced the right in their constitution, and all have signed the U.N.'s International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which recognizes "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

By Ched Myers

Skeptical of the State?

Christians and anarchists are both part of today's activist mix, and should be in conversation.

FROM THE STREETS of Ferguson to Charlottesville and from Occupy to Standing Rock, anarchists represent a prominent part of today's activist mix. How might Christians understand this tradition of political engagement?

In popular culture, anarchism is often trivialized as a cipher for generalized chaos, based on a caricature of hooded black bloc brawlers smashing store windows at protests. On the other hand, some anarchists settle for mere sloganeering, with little analysis or strategy. But simplistic stereotypes fail to recognize that, as social critic Cornel West put it, anarchism represents "a powerful critique of concentration of power in the nation-state."

The label derives from the Greek *anarchos*, meaning "without rulers" (*not*, as some libertarians wrongly assume, without *rules*). Anarchists work for voluntary, nonhierarchical forms of self-organization and against state coercion and oppression.

As a social movement and ideological orientation, political anarchism began coalescing in the wake of the failed social revolutions of 1848 around Europe. Early anarchists critiqued the state as the root of all human oppression, and as the "left of the left" challenged

The U.S. is not yet a party to that treaty. But we are a nation of people deeply respectful of faith traditions, and those traditions are unequivocal in their insistence that health care is a human right. We must reaffirm that commitment now in our congregations, our communities, and in the government that represents us. ■

Sister Simone Campbell, SSS, is executive director of Network. Fran Quigley is director of the Health and Human Rights Clinic at Indiana University McKinney School of Law and coordinator of People of Faith for Access to Medicines.

Marxist assumptions that revolutions could only be accomplished by changing state structures from the top down. Some proposed communal self-rule and "mutual aid" as an alternative to social Darwinism.

The majority of the tradition was (and remains) decidedly atheist—"no gods, no masters." But Pierre-Joseph Proudhon allowed that early Christianity was essentially anarchist until the church sold out to Constantine, while Peter Kropotkin argued the same about popular radical religious movements of the late Middle Ages. Indeed, there have been Christian dissidents who have drawn on the teachings of Jesus to reject the legitimacy of the state, such as Anabaptists during the Reformation.

In the late 19th century, Leo Tolstoy developed anarcho-pacifist convictions by reading the Sermon on the Mount and encouraged alternative communities that rejected the coercive authority of church, state, and private property. Tolstoy's philosophy of nonresistance was later developed

into nonviolent action by Mohandas Gandhi. Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day was also shaped by Tolstoy, as well as by American Jewish anarchist Emma Goldman

Small communities
repudiated Caesar's
"lordship" and
practiced mutual aid.

From the Archives

August 1993

A Solitary Witness

ON AUG. 8, 1943, the night before he was beheaded for refusing to fight for Hitler's army, Franz Jagerstatter sat in a Berlin prison cell, deep in intimate prayer with God. On a table in front of him lay a piece of paper, a promise to serve in the Nazi medical corps. All he had to do was sign his name and the Nazis would let him live.

It was a simple choice. His guards encouraged him to sign the paper. His parish priest and bishop prayed for him to sign it and save himself. His wife and three little girls begged him to give up his one-man stand against imperial violence and sign the document so that one day he could come home.

But no. He had already made his choice. He would not fight. He would not kill. He would not support Hitler's war or anybody's war in any way. And so he sat there, only hours before his execution, motionless, deep in prayer, not crying, not panicking, not overcome with fear. Franz was at peace. He was at one with the God of nonviolence.

Such was the faith of Franz Jagerstatter, executed 50 years ago on Aug. 9, 1943, for refusing to join Hitler's army. His witness ranks him among the 20th century's most noble examples of Christian discipleship. ... Many thought (many still think) that it would have been better if Franz had compromised, at least for the sake of the children. But Franz possessed, like Jesus, a stubborn nonviolence. No compromises, no concessions, no exceptions. ■

John Dear, SJ, worked with the homeless in Washington, D.C., when this article appeared.



and French Catholic agrarian personalist Peter Maurin. For almost a century the Catholic Worker movement has been the most significant proponent of gospel anarcho-pacifism.

A few 20th century Protestant theologians echoed anarchist critiques, most notably Jacques Ellul and Vernard Eller. More recently many young post-evangelicals have embraced various expressions of "Christianarchy" in activism and lifestyle (see for example jesusradicals.com).

The oldest tradition of anarchism, however, pre-dates civilization itself. For 99 percent of our time on the planet, human lifeways were organized in small bands that were bioregionally self-sufficient, cooperative, and essentially egalitarian—until the rise of predatory, hierarchical societies beginning roughly 6,000 years ago (as argued most recently in James C. Scott's *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*).

One of the earliest expressions of

tribalized resistance to state domination in the ancient Near East is found in the Bible. A strong skepticism of centralized power weaves throughout our scriptures, from Jotham's parable of the trees (Judges 9:7-21) parodying hierarchical politics to Samuel's sober warning against kingship models (1 Samuel 8), and from Jesus' rejection of empire to Paul's network of small communities that repudiated Caesar's "lordship" and practiced mutual aid (2 Corinthians 8-9).

Both Christian and anarchist traditions are rooted in a deep past, imagine a visionary future, and embody strategies of social resistance and renewal here and now—striving, as Dorothy Day put it, "to build a new society in the shell of the old." Which is why they ought to be in thoughtful conversation. ■

Ched Myers is a Sojourners contributing editor and co-director of Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries (bcm-net.org) in the Ventura River watershed of Southern California.

By Jean Stokan

'For I Was a Stranger...'

Trump's border cruelty extends to legal immigrants as well.

IN MAY, the Trump administration ended Temporary Protected Status for Hondurans, opening the door for the deportation of nearly 60,000 legal immigrants to the U.S. and threatening the security of their American-born children. The Department of Homeland Security is systematically stripping TPS status from more than 300,000 people, including immigrants from El Salvador (195,000), Haiti (50,000), Nepal, Nicaragua, and Sudan. Decisions on Yemen and Somalia are expected in July.

Temporary Protected Status enables foreign nationals to live and work in the United States while conditions exist in their home countries that prevent safe return, such as armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extreme circumstances. Hondurans were granted TPS following Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Honduras holds the second-highest rate of nationals murdered after their deportation, according to the Immigrant Legal Resource Center.

The "crucified people" from Central

America are "not so much pursuing the American dream as they are fleeing the Central American nightmare," said Jesuit priest Dean Brackley, who spent more than 20 years teaching in San Salvador, in 2011.

In May, six religious and human rights defenders from Honduras came to the U.S. to describe how that Central American nightmare has become far worse. They reported that 300 people per day are fleeing Honduras following the widely contested presidential election in 2017. Their message? If you want to end migration from Honduras, then cut off U.S. support for the security forces in their country. Invest instead in education, health care, and the release of political prisoners and support free and fair elections in Honduras. Doing so might help restore the rule of law in Honduras and reverse the spiral of violence.

U.S. policy there has helped create migrants by the tens of thousands. Since a U.S.-supported military coup in 2009 that deposed the president, drug trafficking and organized crime have skyrocketed. Honduras

has one of the highest murder rates in the world. Corruption is rampant up to the highest levels of government. Human rights violations by security forces are carried out with near total impunity.

Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández had supported the coup, as a member of Congress, and later engineered the militarization of Honduran society. Hernández was implicated in a massive corruption scandal and has flagrantly violated the Honduran constitution by running for a second term in November. He claimed victory despite such massive fraud that the Organization for American States called for new elections.

The Trump administration quickly recognized Hernández as the winner and consistently celebrates him as a great partner in the region. Hondurans who peacefully protested the flawed elections met excessive violence by state security forces. Dozens were killed and wounded, hundreds more detained.

Jesuit priest Ismael Moreno, a human rights defender in Honduras who received three new death threats following his open criticism of Hernández and the elections, said, “Migrants who head [to the U.S.] are not delinquents, but they are the poor for whom the opportunities to live a life of dignity in Honduras closed. They’re not ... terrorists, nor drug traffickers, and even worse, they’re not ‘animals,’ as Trump called them. They’re people who are desperate, people who have been forced to leave because of a government the United States supports.”

This is a critical moment for Honduras, and one needing the engagement of U.S. faith communities. While previous administrations of both parties repeatedly extended TPS protections for Hondurans, Trump’s decision in May was the latest in a series by the administration ending protections for people from various countries, using a narrow interpretation of the TPS legal statute. TPS recipients, many who have been in the U.S. for two decades, now face heart-wrenching decisions about whether to take their U.S.-born, citizen children back to the furnace of violence their country has become. ■

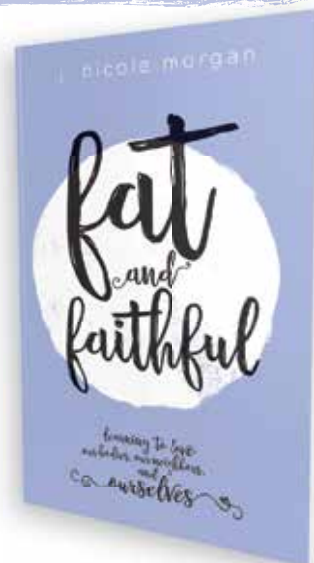
Jean Stokan is a member of the Institute Justice Team for the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

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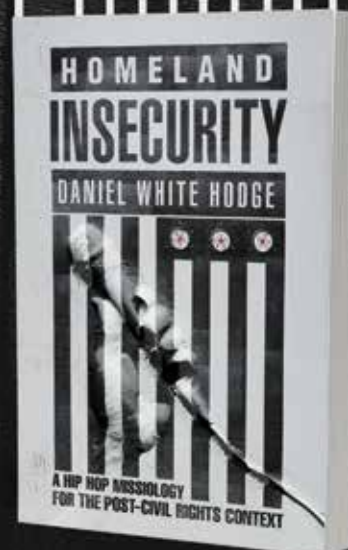


AUGUST 2018 | fortresspress.com/fatandfaithful

AT THE INTERSECTION OF
BLACK LIBERATION, HIP HOP,
AND RECONCILIATION

“Hodge introduces us to the prophets and poets who have discovered God at the margins and invites us to take a seat and learn from them. This is not a manual for church renewal. This is an invitation to resurrection.”

JR. FORASTEROS,
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VIDEO



JP Keenan/Sojourners

Guns and Garden Tools

At a recent demonstration against gun violence in Philadelphia, activists cut, melted, and beat an AR-15 assault-style rifle into a garden tool. The protest was inspired by passages in Micah and Isaiah that envision a time when God's people "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Watch the full video at sojo.net/video.

INTERVIEW

Optimism v. Dying

The scripts for sick people are so thick, and so prohibitive," Duke Divinity School professor Kate Bowler told Sojourners' Catherine Woodiwiss. Below is an excerpt from their conversation about Bowler's new book on suffering, death, and her life with incurable Stage 4 cancer.

Woodiwiss: Let's start with your title: *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*. What are some of these lies, and where did they come from?

Bowler: Where did they come from? My own delicious penchant for heresy, as it turns out! I started writing because, on the surface, it was very hard to express how complicated it felt to be sick. ... [B]ut then the more I wrote, the more I realized, "Oh I am *deeply* invested in ideas that I didn't realize I believe in." Like, "I can conquer any obstacle you put in my path." That somehow, "My shiny personality will be able to navigate any obstacle." Like, "Sometimes sheer optimism does most of the work that prevents you from dying." As it turns out, none of those things are true.

Woodiwiss: Do you see traditions in Western, American culture that teach us to *suffer* well? To give up well?

Bowler: Oh, man. I think people like having different tools. So, for instance, from higher church tradition, I have loved that they have liturgies for hospital rooms. And they have more anointing oil than my forehead can absorb. I love that. They are great at having rhythms of suffering that have been handed down. Pentecostals are fantastic, because they're just going to get right in there and take their time. "Oh, are you suffering? Great. I have four hours—I will spend it all on you!" [Laughs.]

Read the full interview at sojo.net/bowler.

QUOTED

“The NFL is one of the most prominent denominations of the United States' religion.”

— Seth Wispelwey

on requiring NFL players to stand for the national anthem
sojo.net/wispelwey

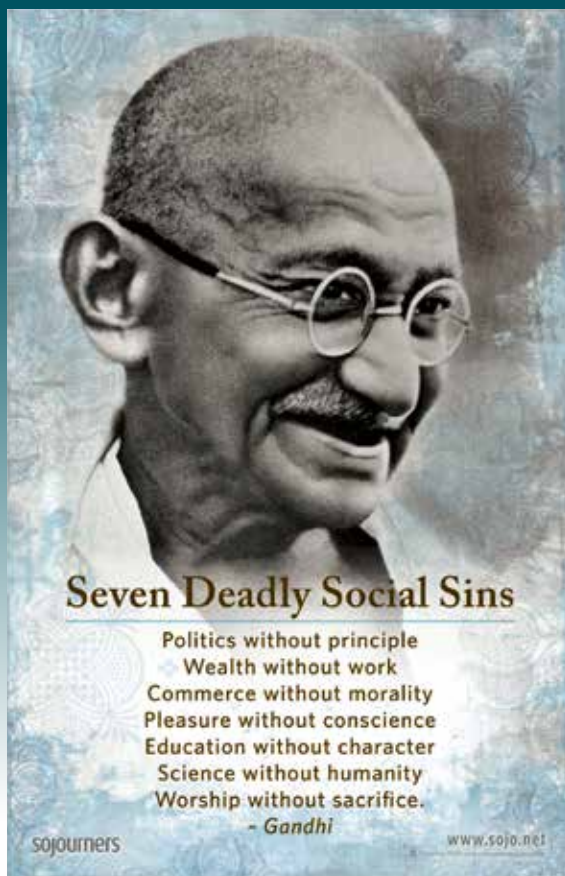
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Equal Justice Initiative

The Theory of the Shrunken Heart

THERE IS A short film embedded in the wall just to the left of the welcome desk in the lobby of the Equal Justice Initiative's new Legacy Museum, which opened to the public on April 26. The first time I visited the museum, I stood in a crowd watching the video and tried to comprehend the story. An African-American girl clung to her father's neck as he carried her, walking slowly toward white men standing in a field. The setting? The Antebellum South.

That film left me weeping—near wailing—right there in the lobby.

A few weeks later, I returned with participants on a weeklong pilgrimage through the history of

incarceration, and present-day police brutality.

At the museum I learned about an African-American teacher named Elizabeth Lawrence. She was walking home in Birmingham, Ala., on July 5, 1933, when white schoolchildren threw rocks at her. She reprimanded the children, as a teacher would. That night the children's parents lynched her.

The pilgrimage participants and I walked through the labyrinth of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, overwhelmed by its 800 Corten steel monuments, each representing a county where a man, woman, or child was lynched in the United States. I remembered

14-year-old Emmett Till, who was snatched from his great-uncle's home, tied up, and beaten. His murder-

ers tied a 74-pound cotton-gin fan to his naked body with razor wire and tossed him into the Tallahatchie River. The memorial baptized the pilgrimage participants and me in stories of the killed.

THE NEXT DAY I interviewed Dr. Bob Zellner, veteran SNCC organizer of European descent. After the cursory get-to-know-you conversation, I asked *the* question: "What drove white people to fight to the death to maintain white supremacy?"

"I've developed a

theory," Zellner said. "It's the theory of the shrunken heart. First, you have to understand slavery was an act of war that had to be carried out every day against black people." He explained that people were captured in the context of war and sold as an act of war.

It all clicked: the torture instruments employed by slave owners and overseers, the sexual violence, the lynching, the drug war, the mass incarceration, Ferguson, Baltimore, the militarization of our border, the criminalization of immigration and refugee status. They were acts of war—acts of domination meant to maintain and protect a white nation.

"For centuries, through slavery and later through Jim Crow and the sharecropper economic system in the South, white Southerners had to constantly suppress their own feelings of sympathy and empathy for another human being," Zellner explained. "In the same way they had to steel their feelings for that chicken or calf that was slaughtered on the farm so they could eat, they steeled their feelings for people of color."

"For centuries," Zellner concluded, "white people have shrunken their own hearts."

Let's just sit in that for a moment. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper, author of The Very Good Gospel, is founder and president of FreedomRoad.us.



She reprimanded the children, as a teacher would. That night, their parents lynched her.

the control of African bodies on U.S. soil. The journey—offered for continuing education and graduate credit through Greenville University—began in Montgomery, Ala., at the Legacy Museum. Each of the participants watched the video. One woman was so overwhelmed with grief that she had to leave the museum.

The Legacy Museum and the accompanying National Memorial for Peace and Justice shine light on details that have been hidden from us. They help us understand the humanity of the oppressed and the cruelty of slavery, Jim Crow, mass



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The High Ground



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Marc Averette/Shutterstock

Miami's tides are rising, so investors are moving inland— into historically black neighborhoods • by JULIENNE GAGE

LESS THAN 100 YEARS AGO, the introduction of air conditioning made Miami one of the most desirable tourist destinations in America. Today, with a metro area population of nearly 3 million, it's an even bigger cosmopolitan hot spot, with residents of all socioeconomic backgrounds vying for land in a sea of traffic and, to some degree, rising tides.

Like most of America's urban centers, Miami is facing widespread gentrification. Plagued by limited public transportation and a desire to work and play in artsy urban districts, increasing numbers of affluent and middle-class residents have been moving inland, pushing immigrants, minorities, and the working class far into the suburbs or beyond county lines.



Climate change, according to some community activists, is exacerbating this phenomenon. In fact, it could soon make Miami a major U.S. focal point for climate justice.

Historically, being on the teal-colored ocean or bay was a priority for the privileged, so the poor were relegated to the

It's a phenomenon local activist Valencia Gunder refers to as "climate gentrification."

Gunder, 33, grew up in Liberty City, popularized by the Oscar-winning 2016 film *Moonlight*, which speaks to the juxtaposed joys and struggles of black Miami. This northwest neighborhood was built in the 1930s to alleviate population density

"My next-door neighbor was a lawyer and the other neighbor was a big-time pastor. My grandma was working two jobs, but we lived on the same street for many years, so I know what a healthy mixed community can look like," she said, during an interview from the renovated living room of the Liberty City home she bought



interior—with black people specifically being subject to redlining and segregation—removed from much of what gave Miami the nickname "Magic City." But on average, Miami is only about six and a half feet above sea level, so as the climate warms and tides rise, some investors and renters are moving inland, searching for higher ground in historically black neighborhoods such as Overtown, Liberty City, and Little Haiti.

in downtown Miami's Overtown, one of the only neighborhoods for people of color during segregation. It accommodated middle-class African Americans with modest single-family homes and yards. Over the years, endemic poverty and racism would take its toll, as would South Florida's tumultuous drug wars of the 1980s and 1990s. But Gunder says Liberty City still had a lot of perks.

through a short sale with first-time home-buyer incentives.

She fears Miami-style gentrification will replace that with snobbery and indifference. Liberty City is minutes from the freeway, Miami International Airport, and the city's downtown—and an easy 20-minute drive across Biscayne Bay to Miami Beach. These features, combined with low real estate prices, appeal to outsiders.



“This was my mission ... to give people hope to fight so that they have something for their grandchildren.”

“It’s really strange to see rich people driving their Bentleys through Liberty City, or walking their poodles across the street from the projects,” she said.

Gunder is convinced these investments have a climate component, since Liberty City and its neighboring Little Haiti rest at 10 feet, Miami’s highest elevation. She

‘The most grossly unequal city in America’

One such developer is Miami realtor Peter Ehrlich, a New York transplant who began investing in residential and commercial real estate in Miami in the 1990s and owns about four acres of “high”-elevation property around Little Haiti. He started on the beach, then moved inland in search of better prices.

“At the time, I didn’t think about sea level rise in the slightest, but since then I think about it immensely because it’s in the news almost every day,” he said, noting that it certainly has reaffirmed his decision to invest in Miami’s higher-elevation urban core. He says he doesn’t know any realtors who are investing in those areas with the express purpose of avoiding sea level rise, but that it would make sense for them to begin considering that.

Referring to land near the train tracks in Little Haiti, Ehrlich told *The Atlantic* during a 2016 interview, “Even though the tracks are a mile in, that may be the future waterfront.”

In January 2017, the real estate website Zillow called Little Haiti the hottest residential neighborhood in South Florida. Its home values were expected to rise 4.6 percent, compared to 1.6 percent in the rest of the region.

Realtor Phalange Brutus, a Little Haiti native, says housing prices reflect the rising tides. From the early 2000s until now, modest three-bedroom homes in that area have jumped from the low \$200,000s to nearly



Photos by Julianne Gage

Valencia Gunder grew up in Miami’s historically mixed-race Liberty City neighborhood. Today, many residents are being pushed out by gentrifiers looking for a higher elevation in a flood-prone coastal city. She’s working to raise awareness around what she calls “climate gentrification.”



In 2008, Pastor Willie L. Williams Sr. moved back to the historically black Overtown neighborhood where he grew up as an example to others—“to give people hope to fight.”

At left, a Caribbean market in Little Haiti’s distinctive architectural style, and a neighborhood mural, both on increasingly valuable higher ground.



HistoryMiami Museum

says she first began recognizing the role of climate change in 2016, when high-end developers showed up at local city commission meetings announcing their expectation that Liberty City and neighboring Little Haiti would one day become beachfront property.

“We may be thinking about next week, but they’re thinking about the next 20 years,” she said.



Little Haiti—the small red circle—sits several feet above sea level and will remain dry as the water levels rise around it in coming decades.



\$1 million following the recovery from the 2008 foreclosure crisis. During that same period, the sea level began rising faster.

Now Brutus is working with the community outreach group Catalyst Miami, which offers leadership workshops to address neighborhood resilience. “These developers have a lot of money, and with that money comes a lot of mitigation and risk assessment,” he said. “That’s why I started to realize there might be something bigger going on here.”

Activists say a map project initiated by Hugh Gladwin, professor of global and sociocultural studies at Miami’s Florida International University, helped confirm this. It shows the time periods when various parts of Miami will end up underwater, underlining just how vulnerable the region is in an era of rapid climate change.

“In most places, they build dikes, dams, or levies to keep water out, but we can’t do that here because the water is all underground,” he said. While New Orleans flooded like a bowl during Hurricane Katrina, Miami is actually a sponge-like mound of limestone with an aquifer underneath. Increased rainfall and rising tides cause saltwater to breach freshwater wells, which can lead to brackish drinking water supplies all over.

But Gladwin says climate is more a contributor than the main culprit of Miami’s long cycle of boom-and-bust real estate. Jesse M. Keenan, a Harvard professor of architecture and urban design, agrees. “It’s more infill gentrification than climate gentrification, but does that distinction really matter? Probably not. In the long term, you can probably figure that climate gentrification will be used for

following widespread devastation from Hurricane Andrew in 1992, so for many years homes were cheap. But today those communities are feeling the squeeze from southbound Miamians, and that’s likely to continue as Florida Keys residents displaced by Hurricane Irma last year move north in search of stable, affordable housing.

Gladwin says South Florida will surely

“In the long term, you can probably figure that climate gentrification will be used for moving capital.”

moving capital,” he said. “Miami is the most grossly unequal city in America.” Indeed, a 2016 Brookings Institution study pulled from 2014 Census data showed Miami’s wealthiest 5 percent make about 10.2 times more than the poorest 20 percent.

With the Everglades on one side and an ocean dotted with tiny islands on the other, South Florida’s narrow land mass can be hard to navigate. That’s especially true for the poor and working class. The further north or south they move, the longer and costlier their commute. For a time, Miami’s southern suburbs were a viable option. Many affluent residents left this region

suffer if the blue collar and service industry residents start heading north to other states for better job and housing options.

“People in South Florida pay almost 50 percent of their income for housing, which is astronomical,” said Gladwin. “There’s no way to keep local businesses going if you don’t have a workforce.”

The city of Miami Beach, located on a barrier island separated from Miami and the rest of the mainland by Biscayne Bay, recently invested \$500 million in a pump system officials hope will push floodwaters back into the sea. They’re also considering designs drawn up by about 50 of Keenan’s Harvard students,

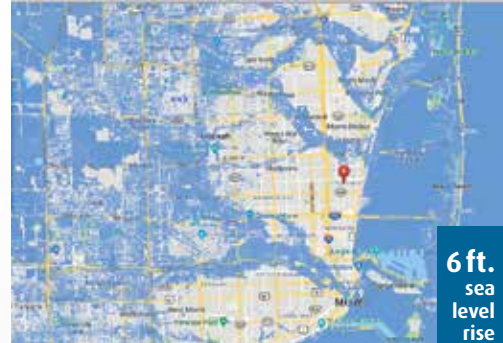




4 ft.
sea
level
rise



5 ft.
sea
level
rise



6 ft.
sea
level
rise

Miami Herald

who have proposed everything from building a sea wall and raising streets to growing patches of bayside mangrove and sea grass and sculpting giant rain-catching cisterns that double as artwork.

"I wouldn't call them solutions. We think there's a present way of thinking and then there's the 2100 way of thinking, which is when things really go off the rails in terms of science. But there's this 15- to 25-year period that is more difficult to plan for," said Keenan. "When you invest in resilience intervention and mitigation, it raises the level of performance. That increases amenities, and with that comes the more desirable area or location. As a consequence, you have a reverse gentrification where the speculative investment moves in and people get priced out."

'Our home, our culture'

Gentrification has set off all sorts of culture wars in Little Haiti. Last year, the neighborhood won a battle to officially change its name to Little Haiti. That pleased most Haitians and some historic preservationists, but it upset others, who remember Lemon City as the black neighborhood that came before. The renaming also brought complaints from realtors who said investors of

all backgrounds prefer neighborhoods with simple names and suggested that the name Little Haiti has a negative connotation.

Activists with Little Haiti's Family Action Network Movement (FANM) say the area can be referred to by both historic names, and they feel protests are part of a larger effort to rid the area of Haitian businesses, cultural centers, and houses of worship, not to mention the residents themselves.

"Most of the business owners in Little Havana are Cuban, but now when you come to Little Haiti, big corporations are buying the places and they want to remove the Haitians," said FANM communications and development director Rhenie Dalger. "They can't just take all Haitians out of Little Haiti like that. This is our home, this is where our culture lies."

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation invested millions to restore and build out a colorful old Caribbean marketplace into what is now known as the Little Haiti Cultural Complex, which houses culturally relevant boutique space, as well as a state-of-the-art auditorium, classrooms, and a mural-infused terrace for meetings, recreation, arts education, and broader community engagement with Miami's ever-growing arts

districts. But even it survives on renting event space to non-Haitian clients.

Meanwhile, in Overtown—once a major destination for jazz artists who were invited to perform but not stay in Miami Beach hotels—the sense of neighborhood is quickly being evaporated by high rises. There are efforts to restore and preserve a few Overtown buildings, most notably churches, including one that was turned into a small cultural center. But even the home of influential African-American businessman Dana Albert Dorsey (1872-1940) rots behind a chain-link fence, a shredded blue tarp on its back roof offering little protection from tropical downpours. It's hard to miss the construction cranes climbing into the sky a few blocks from the official city sign marking this as a historic property.

This is heartbreaking to Pastor Willie Williams, who grew up in the neighborhood. In the 1990s, he was able to purchase two tiny buildings his family had rented for barber and notary services along Overtown's main street for four decades. Then, in 2008, he sold a large suburban home he owned further north and moved his family back into the area, to serve as an example to others.



“They can’t just take all Haitians out of Little Haiti like that. This is our home.”

“This was my mission, to come back home and make a difference, to give people hope to fight so that they have something for their grandchildren,” he said.

He wishes other church leaders could do the same, but his current mortgage and expenses are \$8,000 a month, so he understands how hard it is for those who own property to hold onto it. Still, he encourages his parishioners to consider selling to church and community groups if they do decide to move on.

Empty high-rises

Miami native and Christian environmental justice activist Vickie Machado admits South Florida’s faith-based communities could be doing a lot more to acknowledge and address these issues. She’s a doctoral student in ecology and religion at the University of Florida in Gainesville. She also mobilizes people of faith to start dialogues around the intersectionality of the environment, poverty, and religion in places such as Flint, Mich., and native communities in the Midwest and Hawaii, but she has yet to bring a group to her hometown to study climate gentrification.

“People forget Florida’s deep environmental and social history because [the state] is so transient,” she said, but she added that despite its international makeup, racism has been endemic there since the beginning of colonization and U.S. expansion. “I think

if the church or faith-based groups can get organized, they’ll start to see that the social injustice issues are happening around land and resource-based issues,” she said. “It’s ground zero for climate change.”

Developers are also gentrifying low-lying neighborhoods such as Little Havana, Brickell, and West Grove, a historic Bahamian community that sits slightly inland from the shores of the affluent Coconut Grove neighborhood. These areas are closely connected to the amenities of downtown Miami and the county’s metro and train lines.

In contrast, nearby Miami Beach is walkable, but it’s an island. With a long lease, a one-bedroom with a bay view, pool, and gym in the South Beach neighborhood can cost the same as, or less than, a loft in a gentrifying mainland neighborhood. But the luxury is temporary for most. In recent years, heavy rains have caused so much flooding that parked cars float down South Beach’s streets. In 2016, there were reports of a live octopus washed up in a parking garage, and even with the new pump system, flooding persists.

That’s no biggie for high-season tourists who rent or own property in new developments and renovated buildings. But the flooding losses are significant to the working- and middle-class long-term residents. For years many hospitality workers—a large portion of whom are foreign-born—managed

to squeeze entire families into quaint art deco structures, evading hurricane evacuation by boarding up jalousie windows to weather the storms. Now they know their beach days are numbered.

But even inland, the Miami area’s generally low salaries and high housing costs are catching up, so it’s hard to say how long even the upper middle class can enjoy the magic. Even though the foreclosure crisis has passed, plenty of downtown high-rises are mostly dark at sundown, as homeless people bed down on the sidewalks below.

Looking at data from the FIU and Harvard studies, it’s hard to imagine too many more generations will be able to stay in any part of South Florida, even if climate analysts, engineers, politicians, and activists can pool a mass of money and talent to navigate these inevitable geographic changes—because eventually it may be all be underwater.

Back in Liberty City, Valencia Gunder says she’s worried, but determined.

“I’m fighting against the system, but I’m hopeful,” she said. “I am still a big believer in mitigation and adaptation, and I do believe that if we all work together to come to some solutions, that we can live with the water.” ■

Julienne Gage is a Miami-based journalist who investigates economic development in the U.S. and Caribbean.



Native Activists Show the Way

SOMETIMES TRAVEL exposes you to new things, and sometimes it reminds you how much is the same the world over.

I've just returned from a long organizing expedition from one end of the Pacific to the other: Japan, Australia, New Zealand, British Columbia, the San Francisco Bay. Many of the issues were the same, of course: plans for new coal mines and oil pipelines.

But what really struck me was that almost everywhere I went, Indigenous people are driving the fight. Whether it is battling new coal mines in Australia, protecting the Great Australian Bight from offshore drilling, stopping fracking in New Zealand, battling the Kinder Morgan pipeline headed for Vancouver, or standing up to California Gov. Jerry Brown over the Golden State's endless oil drilling, native activists are leading the way.

This should come as no surprise. Groups such as Tom Goldtooth's Indigenous Environmental Network have been at the forefront for decades; younger leaders such as

new groups, and arguments that had been too little heard got a much broader airing.

Sovereignty, for one. By now, everyone with a conscience acknowledges that European

not just of those places but of the whole planet. In fact, the messages of our most ancient wisdom traditions mesh powerfully with our most modern: Climate scientists and tribal elders have little trouble reaching common agreement on what needs to be done to save both the Earth and those places on it that mean everything to the people who have inhabited them for eons.

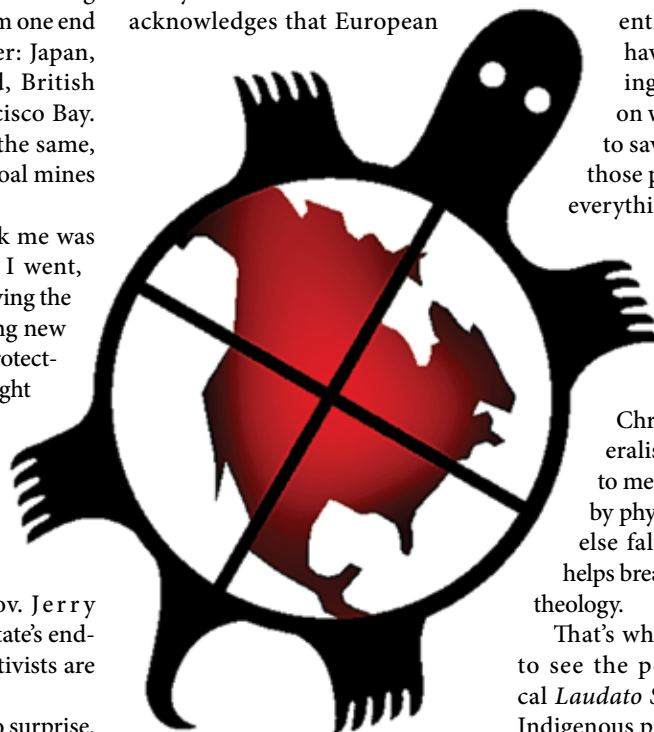
This is a great challenge to other, more recent theologies.

Christianity—like neoliberalism—needs to be able to meet the questions posed by physics and chemistry, or else falter. If your theology helps break the planet, it's a bad theology.

That's why it was so powerful to see the pope, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, acknowledge that Indigenous people "are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values."

The same is true of all of us. We need the teaching our brothers and sisters have to offer. Hopefully, their missionaries will be kinder than the ones we sent in their direction. ■

Bill McKibben is the Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.



Indigenous Environmental Network logo

If your theology helps break the planet, it's a bad theology.

Clayton Thomas-Müller and Melina Laboucan-Massimo have long been raising the alarm about Canada's tar sands; and in the low-lying islands of the Pacific, great organizers are fighting against rapid climate change in every forum they can find. Winona LaDuke, Pennie Opal Plant, Rueben George—it's an endless list. But perhaps Standing Rock—the great battle over the Dakota Access Pipeline—helped everyone see the depth and breadth of this leadership. New leaders appeared, and

arrivals to the various new worlds treated those who were already there cruelly and unjustly. But it's not just history. Even on those lands to which Indigenous people were exiled, the power to make decisions as the nations they are has been ignored, overridden. The exercise of that sovereignty won't always please environmentalists—some tribes mine coal on their land, for instance. But it is a bottom-line requirement of human rights.

And it goes deeper than that. The deep Indigenous commitment to *place*, the understanding that local landscapes and wildlife and plants carry spiritual significance, is proving crucially important in the defense





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Nationwide, 2,400 people—most of them white men—make decisions that can mean the difference between an innocent person going free or going on death row.

'The Most Powerful People in the System'

by JEMAR TISBY

AMERICA HAS A CRISIS of mass incarceration, and it has little to do with crime rates. The system is broken: America imprisons more of its citizens than any other nation in the world. Even though the United States contains just 5 percent of the world's population, the nation has nearly 25 percent of the world's prisoners. At every point, from the laws on sentencing to policing practices and health conditions in prisons, impersonal forces exact a very personal toll on incarcerated persons and their families.

Many citizens have started to work on solutions by raising awareness, legalizing drugs such as marijuana, and passing laws that require police officers to wear body cameras. But one critical function of our legal system has received too little attention from Christians and the rest of the public: local prosecutors.





Local prosecutors, or district attorneys, as they are formally known, hold enormous influence. These 2,400 individuals nationwide have the authority to determine when, how, and how severely to charge a person with a crime. They help determine when someone goes home and when someone goes to prison for decades. Their decisions could mean the difference between an innocent person going free or going on death row.

I first became aware of the issues related to local prosecutors while attending a lecture at the University of Mississippi in fall 2017. I was there to hear James Forman Jr. talk about his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*, which describes how black Americans, for complex reasons, supported the “tough on crime” policies that led to mass incarceration. During the Q&A that followed Forman’s lecture, one student asked Forman how nonlawyers could join in the effort to reform the criminal justice system. A part of Forman’s response remained with me.

“Get involved in local races,” he said. “Local prosecutors are the most powerful people in the system, but nobody votes in these races.”

Forman is right: District attorneys and their staff sustain relatively little public attention in the current conversation about criminal justice, despite their outsized impact. Citizens are not powerless—and Christians, especially, should be interested in creating a system that fairly punishes offenders and protects the innocent. Local prosecutors are critical components of that process.

What do district attorneys do?

The district attorney (DA) serves as the primary person responsible for prosecuting people accused of a crime. If someone gets arrested, it is the district attorney who holds that person accountable for their alleged crimes and sees that he or she faces consequences under the law.

They have discretion about whether to pursue a criminal case, what charges the defendant will face, the severity of the proposed penalties, whether to offer a plea deal, and what methods and evidence will be used to try the case. They have the authority to issue subpoenas, initiate investigations, and grant immunity to witnesses. “State’s attorney” and “prosecuting attorney” are alternative titles for this

powerful position. The highest prosecutor of a state is the state attorney general, and the highest prosecutor in the nation is the U.S. attorney general.

In most cases, the district attorney is an elected official who typically serves a term of four years. Their territory usually covers a single county, but in more sparsely populated areas the DA may oversee several counties at once. District attorneys don’t prosecute all cases of a jurisdiction, but rather work with a team of prosecutors called assistant or deputy district attorneys. These teams handle most of the cases, with the district attorney getting involved with the most important or high-profile trials.

District attorneys have broad latitude to determine the penalties and charges they pursue in a case, and problems enter when “tough on crime” and “law and order” rhetoric—too often racially coded language for harsher policing of black, brown, and poor people—inclines prosecutors to pursue high conviction rates and maximum penalties. It has become common for prosecutors to pursue convictions by any means necessary.

Prosecutors possess enormous power over the freedom or incarceration of alleged criminals, but they have very little accountability. Voters in local elections have the power to regulate the behavior of prosecutors in exercising their preferences, but turnout for these elections is typically very low.

For example, in Philadelphia’s most recent district attorney race in 2017, an unprecedented number of voters turned out: 20 percent. Newspapers touted this percentage—the highest since 1997—because, in typical races, just 12 to 13 percent of eligible voters head to the polls. Such low turnouts are significant because the stakes are so high.

Demographics also factor into the crisis of justice at the district attorney level. On a national level, DAs are a remarkably homogenous group. A 2015 report by the Reflective Democracy Campaign found that 95 percent of the country’s elected prosecutors are white, and 83 percent are men. Only 1 percent are women of color.

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all-white and all-male
prosecution force
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defendants of color
and women.

These numbers matter because studies have repeatedly shown that implicit bias plays a role in mass incarceration. While specific data about the implicit biases of prosecutors as an isolated group is scant, a study by scholars at UCLA explains that “the conditions under which implicit biases translate most readily into discriminatory behavior are when people have wide discretion in making quick decisions with little

accountability. Prosecutors function in just such environments.” An almost all-white and all-male prosecution force likely translates to disproportionately harsh penalties for defendants of color and women.

On top of their enormous power, lack of accountability, and homogenous demography, district attorneys typically have far more resources and discretion than do public defenders. And some district attorneys remain in office for decades. The Real Justice PAC, an organization founded to help elect reform-minded prosecutors, found that 84 percent of all incumbent district attorneys ran unopposed in 2016.

Prosecutors also maintain close ties with the police force, police unions, and prison guard unions. These organizations have potent political lobbies and deep pockets to help fund, endorse, and elect their preferred candidates. These parties are invested in maintaining the punitive status quo because incarceration rates and conviction rates often have a direct impact on winning grants and funding for prisons and police departments.

Signs of change

All the problems associated with the practices of local prosecutors may seem overwhelming, but there are signs of change. Reform-minded prosecutors across the country aim to disrupt the status quo.

In San Diego County, Calif., the fifth most-populous county in the United States, Geneviève Jones-Wright is committed to reform the office of district attorney. Jones-Wright, a native of San Diego, has practiced law as a deputy public defender since 2006 and is someone who knows firsthand the challenges of seeking justice for clients accused of a crime.

Some of her ideas for change include prioritizing rape kit testing, training law enforcement to counteract their own implicit biases, ending the use of private prisons, and devising a consistent standard for when to release body camera footage.

“Until justice is the focus of the conversation, the DA will always be on the wrong side,” said Jones-Wright. “We need to change from a conviction rate to a justice rate.”

The notable turnout for the city of Philadelphia’s 2017 district attorney election centered on the possibility of change that the eventual winner, Larry Krasner, promised. In his brief time as district attorney, analysts have said that Krasner is coming

Prosecutors possess enormous power over the freedom or incarceration of alleged criminals, but they have very little accountability.

through on his “radical” reform agenda.

In an article for *The Intercept*, activist Shaun King wrote, “So far, having been in office less than three months, [Krasner] has exceeded expectations. He’s doing something I’ve never quite seen before in present-day politics: Larry Krasner’s keeping his word—and it’s a sight to behold.” King goes on to cite several actions Krasner immediately took upon securing the top local prosecutor spot. He fired 31 lawyers who were not committed to his vision for change. He also followed a court order to release the names of 29 officers whose records were so dubious they were placed on a secret “do not call” list as unreliable witnesses.

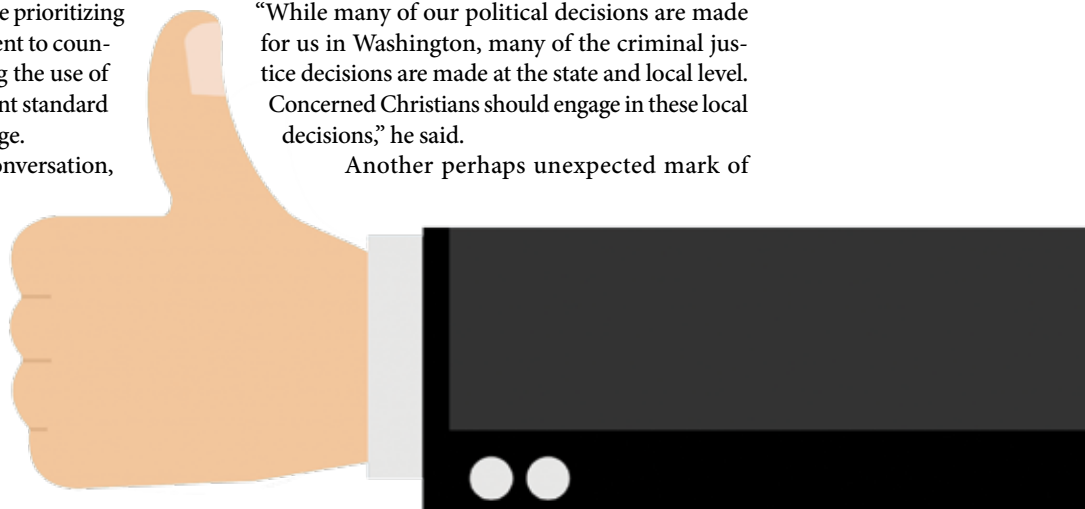
In an internal memo to his attorneys that recently became public, Krasner instructed them to make sweeping changes in their typical practices. In one striking example, he ordered prosecutors to “make plea offers below the bottom end” of the sentencing guidelines recommended by the state of Pennsylvania. In plea deals, he advised prosecutors to seek alternatives to incarceration such as “more house arrest, probationary, and alternative sentences.”

At the beginning of the memo, Krasner explicitly states the reasons for his suggestions. “These policies are an effort to end mass incarceration and bring balance back to sentencing.”

Some criminal justice reform efforts have gained bipartisan support. Joel Bomgar, a Republican state representative in Mississippi, has garnered attention for working across the aisle to improve the criminal justice system and end mass incarceration in his state. Regarding the role of local prosecutors in criminal justice reform, Bomgar encouraged voter participation.

“While many of our political decisions are made for us in Washington, many of the criminal justice decisions are made at the state and local level. Concerned Christians should engage in these local decisions,” he said.

Another perhaps unexpected mark of

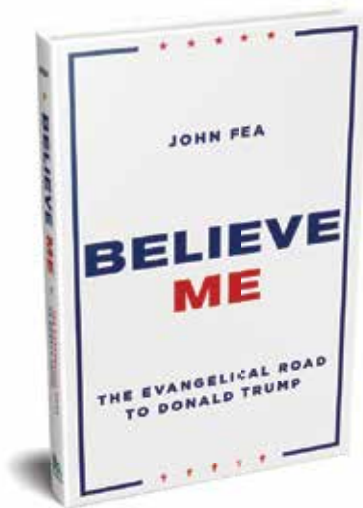




JOHN FEA

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— Jana Riess

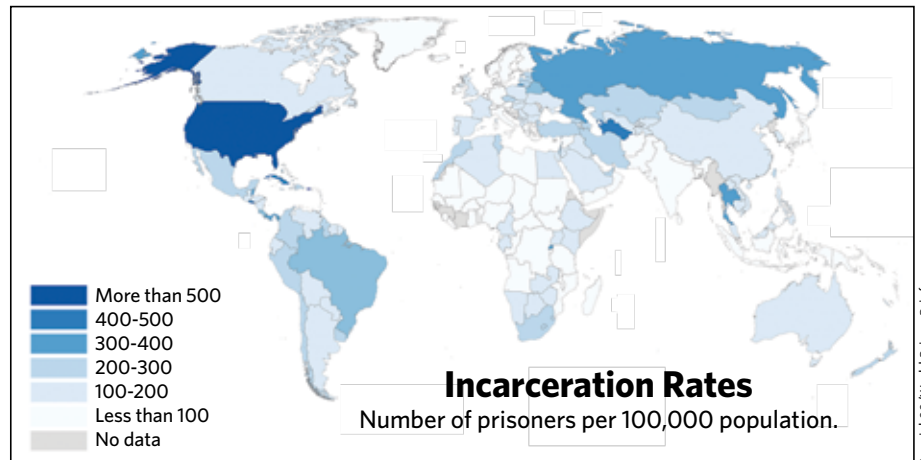
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progress in the fight for criminal justice reform is a museum. The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration opened in Montgomery, Ala., in April (see “A Grief Deferred,” page 30). In contrast to other museums with exhibits that tell the story of slavery in America, the Legacy Museum traces a direct line from past years of slavery to the mass incarceration of the present.

I visited the museum on opening day, and the curators from the Equal Justice Initiative have done a masterful job at immersing visitors into the tragedy of a broken criminal justice system. You can view scenes of police raising their batons over black protesters curled up in the fetal position. You can read heartrending letters from inmates asking lawyers for help in their cases. You can sit in front of a digital projection of a prisoner as you speak to him or her through glass during visiting hours. The presence of such a museum, as sobering as it is to visit, stands as a sign that we as a nation are starting to face the effects of racism on policing and incarceration.

What everyday citizens can do

All citizens have the ability to make a positive difference in the way local prosecutors exercise their responsibilities. Several simple practices can help hold prosecutors accountable and alleviate the epidemic of over-incarceration.

The first step is simply to get informed.

Many citizens cannot name their district attorney, much less describe their policy stances or record on conviction and incarceration. The anonymity of DAs contributes to their ability to operate with little oversight or accountability. Prosecutors must know that their constituents are observing their

actions and holding them to a high standard of justice.

One day, while driving through my town, I noticed a yard sign promoting a candidate for district attorney. As soon as I got home, I looked up the person’s website and read about his platform. Then I learned the name of the person running against him, looked him up online as well, and ended up talking to each candidate individually over the phone to get a sense of their views on justice and the current state of

Voters in local elections have the power to regulate prosecutors, but turnout for these elections is very low.

incarceration. In the nearly two decades that I have been eligible to vote, this was the first time I ever investigated the identity and platform of my district attorney.

A prosecutor bent on increasing his or her own incarceration rates, or who has a proclivity toward punitive sentencing, can do as much or more harm as some accused criminals. To prevent this, citizens must vote in elections for district attorney, rather than forego their right to decide who will be in charge of prosecuting defendants.

James Forman Jr. also recommends immediate action for people who are already in prison. In an interview on *The Daily Show*, Forman said, “While we have people incarcerated, let’s provide them high-quality education. Because the research shows that for every dollar you invest in the education of somebody behind bars, we as a society get \$5 in return, because crime goes down, recidivism goes down, people are more likely to be employed.”

More organizations devoted to criminal justice reform have started to organize. The Real Justice PAC is dedicated specifically to helping fund campaigns and mobilize voters to elect progressive prosecutors at the district attorney level. Its website states: “The Real Justice PAC works to elect reform-minded

prosecutors at the county and municipal level who are committed to using the powers of their office to fight structural racism and defend our communities from abuse by state power.” To elect the prosecutors they endorse, Real Justice PAC raises money and forms and equips teams of volunteers to help with a “big organizing” approach that leverages social media and grassroots campaigns.

Together, individuals and organizations can offer the possibility of substantial transformation in the way district attorneys execute their jobs and whether they support fair practices in the criminal justice system.

Christians and criminal justice reform

Ensuring fairness and equality in the criminal justice system constitutes part of the Christian call to love one’s neighbor and to seek justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed. God hates unjust scales, bribes, and a corrupt legal system.

Many reformers see the critical role that the church can play in improving outcomes for those accused of a crime, at every step of the process. Even after release, many formerly incarcerated persons find it difficult to readjust to life outside of prison. They struggle to find employment, secure a driver’s license, and find housing. Forman suggests that churches assist as many released inmates as possible with these relatively mundane efforts. Even helping a single person can make a dramatic difference.

Jones-Wright sees her efforts to bring justice to the office of the district attorney as integral to her faith. “I really do feel we [Christians] have a responsibility to right wrongs. We have to do everything in our power to make sure there is equity. I believe those are Christian principles.”

Given the massive number of prison inmates and the incalculable impact of their incarceration on themselves, their families, and their communities, criminal justice reform—and the role of local prosecutors, in particular—presents an urgent problem for all citizens to address. Christians could lead the way in promoting positive changes in sentencing and imprisonment rates. It all starts at the local level when Christians exercise their role as citizens by knowing and holding accountable the prosecutors who enforce the law. ■

Jemar Tisby, president of The Witness: A Black Christian Collective, is a Ph.D. student in history at the University of Mississippi. His book The Color of Compromise: The Truth About the American Church’s Complicity in Racism is forthcoming from Zondervan.



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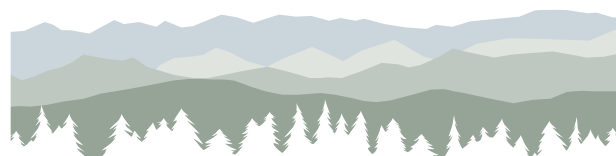
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EQUAL HOUSING
OPPORTUNITY



In the sacred space of the new National Memorial for Peace and Justice, there are more than 800 suspended steel columns, each engraved with a county and state and the names of those lynched there.



SoniaKapadia/Wikimedia Commons



Equal Justice Initiative

A Grief Deferred

A memorial to victims of lynching is a place to mourn and honor the dead—and a reminder of the justice yet to be achieved.

The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in April in downtown Montgomery, Ala. They are projects of the Equal Justice Initiative, a non-profit that challenges racial and economic injustice through advocacy and legal assistance to “the poor, the incarcerated, and the condemned.” EJI spent more than three years and \$20 million to create the 11,000-square-foot museum and the nearby memorial, which are dedicated to more than 4,400 victims of racial violence between 1877 and 1950 in the United States.

MY THROAT STARTED to feel tight a few days before I went to Montgomery this April. I had been planning this pilgrimage to Alabama with my teen children for months but, as the days grew closer, I questioned my body’s ability to walk into the grief that was awaiting us at the Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice.

As a biracial African-American woman putting down roots in the rural South with my white husband and our four children, daily life can feel like an act of resistance. Every day we are faced with Confederate flags and memorials that celebrate an era and mindset that would have made our marriage and my equal ownership of our property a crime. But we love our home, the land, and our neighbors. We want, in the words of Gwendolyn Brooks, “to conduct [our] blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind.”

I was determined to bring my older children to the state of my birth, to take an unflinching look at our racist past and present, and to give them courage to walk the unfinished path toward justice. But still, I found it hard to breathe.

I gardened with a single-minded ferocity in the days before our trip, pulling weeds and digging up long taproots as though I could purge the evils from our land with my bare hands. Red dirt began to lodge deep beneath my nails and in the dry creases of my fingers, my forearms bore slashes from the thorny vines that whipped me as I tore them from the earth. There were flowers, thick with the hopeful scent of spring, trying to bloom beneath the tangle of weeds. I yanked and tore in every spare minute I had, stopping only when I noticed blood pouring from a deep slice on my right forefinger.

For every lynching there was a ripple effect of thousands of African-American people uprooted and not allowed full expression of their grief.

It felt right to come with dirty, bloodied hands into those sacred spaces in Montgomery. In the wake of racialized terror, millions of African-American people hastily left their beloved farms and gardens or left land that their hands were forced to work without fair compensation.

My frantic gardening became a silent prayer for all the hands that came before me. The morning before I left for Montgomery, I drank in the heady smell of blooming lilacs and freshly mulched roses in our front yard, small trophies declaring that this land could be redeemed.

I snapped a photo of the blooms and texted them to my mother, “Please show these to Grandma, tell her they smell delightful.” That morning my mother sent the text we knew was coming: Grandma, 99 years old, had been moved from her recliner to a hospital bed. She was going to die very soon. She had lived a good, long life with four children, 14 grandchildren, and 15 great-grands. Even so, it hurt to imagine her really gone from this earth. My throat tightened as I tried to swallow this singular anticipation of one peaceful death along with the massive dose of thousands of violent deaths memorialized in Montgomery.

There is a name for this anxious tightening of the throat, this heaviness on the heart that made it hard for me to take in the sweet southern air. It’s called grief. I was feeling anticipatory grief for my grandma, compounded by generational trauma lodged in my cells, triggered by every crooked oak tree along the road.

Survivors of trauma, who are “acquainted with grief,” can feel this with such regularity that it seems hard to remember what it is like to feel the smoothness of air gliding through an unrestricted throat. “I can’t breathe,” the dying words of Eric Garner, have become a common refrain of the Black Lives Matter movement not just in remembrance but as a statement of common experience. Every breath feels heavy, I am grieving too many deaths, and I wonder if this day will be the death of me or a loved one.

Long overdue mourning

In Montgomery, this sensation of ongoing racialized terror is captured in a sculpture by Hank Willis Thomas at the Memorial for Peace and Justice. In stark contrast to the freedom implied by the open sky and green grass surrounding the sculpture, a series of bronze black

men are frozen in line with their arms up.

Some faces, arms, and heads are fully visible above the slab of concrete that holds them all, others are sinking: Noses and mouths are just above or below the slab’s surface, and others are almost completely submerged, with just the tops of their heads and their upraised arms showing.

Public art often shows symbolic triumph: These days are over, the chains are broken, enemies are reconciled. In contrast, the honesty and urgency of this sculpture, juxtaposed with hundreds of steel columns, each engraved with the names of African-American people and the counties in which they were lynched between 1877 and 1950, demonstrate the direct link between the past and the present.

The words of Toni Morrison etched in a stone wall at the memorial offer courage to fully love and inhabit our aching bodies: “More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize.” This grip on my throat may never fully loosen, but each breath will feed a heart that will keep loving as it breaks.

Earlier that day, I had stood inside the Legacy Museum before a small sample of the more than 800 jars of earth collected from lynching sites across the country. I reached out to lay a hand on the jar marked “Turner, Brooks County, GA, May 19, 1918.” The staff person standing nearby, serving more as a guardian of the stories than guard, gently reminded me, “We ask you not to touch the jars.” It was nestled between two jars bearing the names Mary and Hayes Turner.

This young family was murdered in a week-long killing spree of at least 13 people in their community. The baby was cut from Mary’s tortured body and uttered “two feeble cries” before being crushed by a person in the mob. This happened on a Sunday. Mother and child were buried in a shallow grave marked with a whiskey bottle; the father’s body was still hanging where he had been killed earlier that weekend so that people could gawk at him on their way home from church.

“There’s a separate jar for the baby,” I whispered, as I pulled my hand away from the cold glass. I asked him if there was any order to the dates and locations of the jars on the shelves, puzzled that the jars for the other people killed in that massacre weren’t there. He told me that they were arranged across time and geographic location to indicate the wide scope of the legacy of lynching.

Continued on Page 34



Getty Images



Brynn Anderson/AP

At top, a visitor contemplates the memorial. Left, "Nkiyinkyim," a sculpture by Kwame Akoto-Bamfo. Above, "Raise Up," a sculpture by Hank Willis Thomas. Both are on the grounds of the memorial.

“But,” unlike the systems of slavery, convict leasing, and mass incarceration, “we keep families together.”

I had not realized what a privilege it is that for the past 30 years, my grandmother’s name and birthday have been etched on the tombstone that she shares with my grandfather in the simple Quaker cemetery where her parents and siblings are also buried. Her birth year, 1918, is the same year the Turner family was lynched.

“Grandma’s going to die soon,” I tell the kids as we take in the weight of the museum and memorial.

“At least she isn’t being lynched,” my son replies. And although it sounds harsh, he is right. There was no fear in her death, an encroaching silence that would be beautiful and right. Her last breath would be the culmination of a life fully lived, her funeral would be both joyous and sad, her burial plot well-tended.

The new museum and memorial in Montgomery create space for mourning the untended bodies of loved ones whose killings were covered by dreadful silence. Out of fear of further harm, families of lynching victims could not publicly mourn. Mary Turner’s lynching was a direct result of her lamenting and demanding justice for her husband’s murder. For every lynching there was a ripple effect of thousands of African-American people uprooted and forced to make a new life on different soil—or more often, concrete—and not allowed full expression of their grief.

I picture the glistening jars of sweet jelly that my grandmother would make each year and offer as gifts to friends and family, a tradition that I carry on. The jars on display in the Legacy Museum, each holding the bittersweetness of a long overdue burial, tombstone, and funeral, evoke a sense of home and can be a gift of healing for this country and to the families of the victims.

This spring has been watered with tears. The week after we got back from Montgomery we went to Ohio for Grandma’s funeral. Every family member had a chance to touch the soft black earth and shovel some into her grave. All we have now are our own hands, and there is work to be done. ■

Josina Guess is a freelance writer and worship leader at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Ga., a Christian service community where she lived for six and half years before moving with her family to a nearby 100-year-old homestead. A Louisville Institute Pastoral Study Project grant supported her Montgomery trip. Josinaskitchentable.blogspot.com.



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Ave María

When we lose our dreams
To be educated
And are afraid
Of being incarcerated

We pray to you
Dios te salve, María,

When we don't know
Where to go
To be a Sitting Bull
Or a Standing Rock

We pray to you
llena eres de gracia,

When your naturaleza
Showed us no mercy
And the politicians
Shut down our Borinquen

We pray to you
el Señor esta contigo.

When we've picked
All the grapes
Without an actual
Bathroom break

We pray to you
Bendita eres

When our hermanas Negras
Are being maimed
And ashamed
By racism, sexism, bigotry

We pray to you
entre todas las mujeres,

When we fight for
Farm workers' rights
While hiding from
Our men's grips at night

We pray to you
y bendito es el fruto



When we walk thru
Hospitals bearing
Generational trauma
From years of sterilization

We pray to you
de tu vientre, Jesús.

When the trees
Sing of pains past
Of joyful times
And all the resilience

We pray to you
Santa María,

When we march
In your shadows
Wearing our
Brown Berets

We pray to you
Madre de Dios,

When we stand
Heads held high
Demanding change as
Young Lords

We pray to you
ruega por nosotros

When we walk
Free and proud
Vomiting rainbows
All over the crowds

We pray to you
pecadores,

When we fill blue buckets
Along the border wall
For our gente to
Safely cross

We pray to you
ahora y en la hora

When our families
Finally have water and electricity
After months of
Restless uncertainty

We pray to you
de nuestra muerte.

When we are afraid
Of being ourselves
And fearlessly be ourselves
All the time

We pray to you
Amén.

*Ayari Marie Aguayo is
a queer Xicana-Boricua
human rights activist.
She is currently active
with The Sanctuaries in
Washington, D.C.*

Illustration by Robert Morales



By Catherine Woodiwiss

360 Degrees of **Empathy**

What lingers after a virtual reality plunge into someone else's trauma?

PRE-EXPERIENCE: Welcome! You're alone except for a receptionist, who gently asks you to sign a waiver and gestures to the couch. The sand-colored cushions perfectly complement the soft pink glow of the wall and a pot of shellacked succulents. The coffee is pleasantly warm. The room temperature is perfect. Everything is fine.

You're here for "Carne y Arena," a virtual reality experience created by Mexican filmmaker Alejandro G. Iñárritu. The project recreates the experiences of immigrants who cross the Mexico-U.S. border. In 2017, "Carne y Arena" ("Flesh and Sand") won a Special Award Oscar, the first given for virtual reality. The exhibit accommodates only one visitor at a time, at 15-minute intervals.

You wait on the couch, feeling a twinge of anxiety over an immersive experience that requires isolation and allows no cameras or notebooks. You contemplate the Pinterest-nirvana of the lobby and scratch a few notes while you can.

Entry: So where are we, exactly?

Soon, you're escorted through the doors of the exhibit, which is housed in an old Baptist church in a gentrifying neighborhood in Washington, D.C. The project will take place across three rooms, a triptych of the migrant experience.

The church was slated for demolition before "Carne y Arena." On the way in, you pass walls that look strangely familiar—you'll later realize they are repurposed fence panels from

Top, a figure walks in the virtual world of "Carne y Arena." At right, an immigrant sits for a digital scan used in the simulation.

40 Liberation for All
Sarah Pritchard reviews
Transforming

41 High Ideals, Political Repression
Anne Colamosca reviews
The Moralist

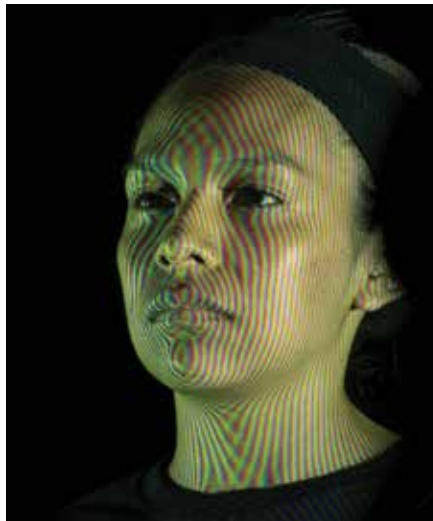
43 A Different Divine Comedy
David Ensign on *God, Improv,*
and *the Art of Living*

gears, to a memory of another pile of shoes, at the Holocaust Museum just down the road. You were 12 years old when you saw those shoes, dread artifacts of a distant, incomprehensible evil. You've never shaken the image.

A voice splits the silence: "Put your jacket in the locker, thank you," and the hairs on your neck stand straight up. You've underestimated *Íñárritu*. The tagline of the experience is "virtually present, physically invisible." But you don't feel invisible, in this sparse, hostile cell—you feel seen—devastatingly seen, and utterly inconsequential. The experience has begun.

The Sonoran: There are no rules

If you've tried "virtual reality," you know it's not the dystopian adventureland it sounds like, not yet. It's basically like watching a 360-degree video: everything we're used to



the U.S.-Mexico border, turned horizontal to fit the dimensions of the house of God. You're pretty sure that works as a metaphor, but before you can chew on it, you're inside.

The Freezer: Give us your jacket

It's cold. Freezing cold. A sign, in English and Spanish, instructs you to remove your shoes, put them in a locker, and sit on a cold metal bench until an alarm sounds. As you sit, you notice shoes spread across the concrete. Another sign explains that these shoes were left behind by immigrants in the Sonoran Desert. They've been collected over a period of seven years. Not a single shoe has a match.

At first, the silence is meditative. You take a few deep breaths, prepare for the alarm.

Nothing happens.

You look closer at the shoes: A little pink sandal. A dusty sneaker. Your temples tingle with shame, and you start to try to imagine the human foot that might have inhabited that shoe, but your brain abruptly switches

in cinema, except the action is not confined to a 2-D rectangle. This gives the viewer more agency, and the cinematographer more work: If I, the watcher, can run anywhere, then you, the director, have to make sure something interesting is happening everywhere.

It is immediately clear, as you walk into a hot, darkened room and feel desert sand crunch beneath your toes, that what *Íñárritu* has created breaks and elevates all of that. Monosyllabic attendants clad in head-to-toe black tell you that you will be left alone, strapped to a backpack, headphones covering your ears, goggles covering your eyes.

Continued on Page 39

New & Noteworthy

Actress and producer
Mariska Hargitay
in *I Am Evidence*



Time to Test

The documentary film *I Am Evidence* sheds light on the growing number of untested rape kits in the U.S. Featuring testimonies of survivors, prosecutors, and advocates, the documentary investigates why this backlog exists and calls attention to those fighting for justice. HBO

Beyond Redemption?

Fifteen years ago, Bryan Bliss witnessed an execution that propelled him to seminary, a stint teaching classes at correctional facilities, and, ultimately, into writing *We'll Fly Away*. This young adult novel tells the story of two friends, Luke and Toby, through Luke's letters from death row. Greenwillow Books

Deep-Rooted Melodies

For her rhythmically bold new album *Save Me*, soul and R&B singer Liz Vice leaned on her own journey and "deep-rooted spirituality." She describes the song "Brick by Brick" as a response to "the brokenness and beauty of humanity" and a call to "build our world together." lizvice.com

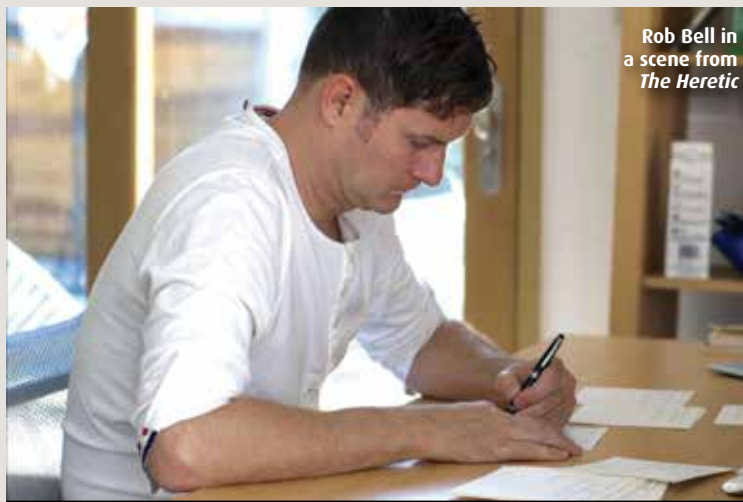
Mentor Musings

Christian scholars, pastors, and leaders reflect on values and practice in *Mentoring: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives*. Featuring Walter Brueggemann, Katie Geneva Cannon, Cristian De La Rosa, and more, *Mentoring* examines ethics and gives "angles of vision into the gracious, expectant, and somewhat demanding mentor/mentee relationship." Eerdmans

Individualism Wins

I JUST STUMBLED onto the whole Rob Bell thing in the past few weeks. Before that, I knew the name, and I vaguely associated it with some headlines about the founder and pastor of the Mars Hill Bible Church in Michigan becoming *evangelical non grata* for writing a book, *Love Wins*, in which he said some thought-provoking things about the afterlife.

That was it. Then, while researching something else, I watched the new documentary *The Heretic* (directed by Andrew Morgan, available on Amazon and iTunes). I was astounded. A 40-something guy was on stage, alone, dressed in what seemed like an ill-fitting hipster costume: Cropped pants, shoes with no socks, and a weirdly undersized jacket. He held just a wireless mike and talked, to a theater filled with 500 or so paying customers, about Jesus and the Bible and what it all really means. This apparently happens all over the country, and



Rob Bell in a scene from *The Heretic*

Rob Bell's religion, or "not-religion," is ultimately more American than it is Christian.

all over the English-speaking world. This was a revelation to me.

Heretic is mostly a tour documentary, of the kind often made about rock bands. So we see lots of shots of people lining up outside theaters waiting to get in, often while being harangued by fundamentalists with bullhorns warning against Bell's "false teachings." And interview footage of Bell sitting in one dressing room or another, interspersed with testimony from many of Bell's prominent fans and a few detractors.

Much of what Bell says in his interviews and on stage is good and, to me, inarguably Christian. Gandhi's not in hell (the starting

point of the *Love Wins* kerfuffle). God is creating the universe and bringing it to completion through a process of evolution. The Bible is written from the point of view of the poor and oppressed, so many U.S. Christians have a hard time "getting it." So far, so good. Most of the time, Bell seems to be trying simply to express Christian truths without resorting to churchy jargon.

I'm more bothered by some of his fans. In the documentary Bell is praised by, for example, memoirist Elizabeth Gilbert; comedian Pete Holmes; Bell's successor at Mars Hill, Kent Dobson; and Carlton Pearson, the subject of the Netflix movie *Come Sunday*. Besides their positive view of Rob Bell, what all these people have in common is that none of them currently profess anything like orthodox Christianity.

I realize that Bell isn't responsible for this lineup; the filmmakers are, and I'm sure Bell has plenty of Christian fans, too. But it does suggest that the unique revelation of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ may be getting a little lost in the shuffle here. That also may be why I come away from *The Heretic*

thinking that Bell's religion, or "not-religion," or whatever you want to call it, is ultimately more American than it is Christian.

To his credit, Bell sees through today's popular evangelical identification of the Jesus movement with U.S. national power. But he can't see that his anti-institutional, do-it-yourself approach to "spirituality" is totally wrapped up in America's most sacred creed: individualism. Well-meaning as it is, this is just another niche-market religion for the social media age, in which people clump into self-selected tribes of "people-like-us" and never have to associate with, much less find common ground with, any of the "not-like-us."

Most Americans today don't need a Christianity, or even a "spirituality," grounded in the affirmation of their uniqueness and freedom of choice. We need one grounded in solidarity and interdependence. And, like it or not, those things can only be expressed in big, broad, and truly diverse institutions. ■

Danny Duncan Collum teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort. He is the author of the novel *White Boy*.



Continued from Page 37

You swallow, nodding, and put on the goggles. You're in.

Blink.

The gorgeous, ominous desert is before you. A light wind blows, shaking both the cactus in the virtual Sonoran and the hairs on your real arm. You feel a light panic rise, fighting disorientation: Within seconds, all your senses are persuading your brain that you're actually here.

Then: A low wailing, and a line of people appears, shuffling toward you. They are bowed over in the heat, some carrying children, others collapsing from dehydration. The coyote guide is on his phone, while an old man searches for shade. Parents and children come closer, nearly walking through you. They are so vulnerable out here, and so alone.

Out of nowhere, a helicopter roars, and the ground shakes beneath you, the sand swirling around your feet. Everyone panics. Searchlights, trucks pulling up, guns pointed, Border Patrol yelling in English and Spanish. Shit, you think, and your knees hit the ground, slamming the sand, a pathetic attempt to stay hidden. People around you are being dragged toward the trucks, and your brain is yelling DON'T HURT THEM (RELAX IT'S NOT REAL) STOP DOING THAT (BREATHE) (OH, JESUS) GET OUT GET ME OUT OF HERE.

You turn, frantic, and spot someone hiding in the bushes. As if he sees you, as if you've given something away, an agent sees the same person, yells, directs others to the hiding spot. No. You were supposed to be invisible, how did you rat someone out? No one said you'd watch families be separated, hauled away. No one said you'd have a gun pointed right at you. Are *you* going to be dragged into a truck? Oh God, is that man going to die, are you going to watch that man die, what is happ—

Blink. The tableau rolls away, and the sun breaks over an empty desert, the dust from the night raid settling like a bad memory. You'll read, later, that you could have seen shoes left behind, shoes that echo, chillingly, the ones you saw in the freezer. You don't see them now, though. You're just thinking you might vomit. You want to weep. You want to die.

"Thanks! Please step into the next room,"



From *Blindspotting*

A BUDDY MOVIE GOES DEEP

LIFELONG FRIENDSHIP is paradoxical. The person who knows you best can also cause the most pain. Another layer of complexity emerges when one party wants to change their life while the other remains fixed on how things used to be. Spend an evening with high school buddies who haven't seen each other for 20 years, and you'll see that unresolved parts of our character tend to appear when old friendships spark off each other.

The utterly thrilling *Blindspotting*, a likely candidate for both the best and most important film of the year, dramatizes friendship as central to being human, with the unresolved dimensions of wider social relationships the main challenge we face to be happy in this life and to have a life at all. It's a brilliant examination of one of the smallest facts of life—boy meets boy—and one of the largest: Since your people persecuted my people, how can we ever become the same people?

The plot is simple: A guy has three days before his probation ends, so he must avoid even the hint of trouble. It doesn't work out, of course. But what sounds like a macho thriller manages to enhance a new genre: seriocomic social commentary—funny, smart, terrifying, humane. Like *Get Out*, this is not a thrill ride for its own sake but a confrontation with abusive power and a naming of evil.

It goes further to allow for the possible redemption of the evildoer.

Directed by Carlos López Estrada and written by co-stars Daveed Diggs and Rafael Casal, *Blindspotting* is a remarkable debut film, with gripping kinetic energy and authentic sense of space. This place feels real, both in its cultural context (evolving notions of masculinity, the empowerment of women, criminal justice disparities, police brutality, and racial distancing) and its physical location of Oakland, Calif., which Estrada conveys as a kind of hybrid chessboard/grungy theme park, the characters sometimes pawns, sometimes players.

This friendship between a black guy and a white guy, loyal beyond limits that most of us will never face, also reveals the experiment that we're all invited into: learning how to serve the common good, acknowledging unearned power, and moving beyond reactivity to other people's behavior toward practicing a better way of being. Two wrongs don't make a right, and contempt for our enemies just fuels the sickness of a culture based on scapegoating. *Blindspotting* knows this and tells it like our lives depend on it. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.



Director Alejandro G. Iñárritu during the making of "Carne y Arena."

says an attendant, lifting your goggles and headphones. You go, the walls turning sideways around you.

The Gallery: Every name

The migrants have names and stories, of course. You meet them in this gallery, tamely lit and curtained. Faces look out at you from the wall, next to lines of text that tell stories of courage and bravery.

"Life has asked so much of me, and has given so little." —Amaru, 20, El Salvador

"One day I prayed to God to be able to sit down at a table and eat with my own family." —Manuel, 19, Guatemala

The comedown from the previous room is exhausting, and strangely alienating. You have just encountered adrenaline-spiking, life-threatening trauma. Now, just as

Iñárritu chooses to shatter the viewer, to break you open into something else.

immediately, you're back to being invisible. Instead, you're asked to look at Amaru, at Manuel.

Once again, Iñárritu has out-manuevered his audience.

What can you do with this harrowing experience, utterly devastating and yet *not even real*?

At the end of the gallery of stories is a notebook for visitors. Every entry is a variation on the same things: fear, heartbreak, urgency, a call for action. And gratitude.

Post-Experience: Flesh and sand

They say that what you do in "Carne y Arena" is a shibboleth for how you see the world. Your teammate, who went in before you, saw beating hearts inside each person; a boy removing his shoes; a mother holding a baby. He engaged with wonder, with grief. You saw none of this. You remember chopper blades, the end of a rifle. You felt every trauma you've ever experienced combine with every one of your worst fears. You were ready to fight, or hide, or bargain. You know, deeply, that you would have done anything to get away in one piece.

"This technology can be used very badly, scarily badly," Iñárritu says. And for as profound and media-bending an entry into storytelling as "Carne y Arena" is, VR remains an expensive, elite tool, available to very few. Iñárritu chooses to shatter the viewer, to break you open into something else, something that demands action, or heartbreak, or gratitude. It is empathy, but it's a devastating dose.

A chilly rain splatters the windshield on your drive back to the office. You and your teammate are both silent for most of the ride. You put your arms around your legs. The Sonoran sand is still clinging to your knees. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is deputy web editor at Sojourners. Visit carneyarenadc.com for more information.

Reviewed by Sarah Pritchard

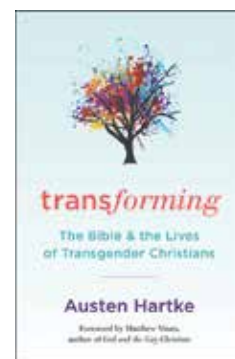
LIBERATION FOR ALL

Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians, by Austen Hartke. Westminster John Knox.

I'VE RECENTLY become acquainted with someone who is locked up in one of California's 35 state prisons. This person also happens to identify as gay and Christian. Despite years of being told he was an abomination during his Southern Baptist upbringing, somehow my friend has managed to hold onto his love of Jesus. In one of his letters, he wrote, "I am annoyed by the attitude that says, 'If you're gay, it's okay because God forgives you,'" pointing to the assumption that gayness is inherently sinful and needs to be forgiven.

This is an important intervention made by author Austen Hartke as well, as the final chapter of *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* asserts the need to move "beyond apologetics" and toward theology that not only tolerates trans identity but also embraces trans people as part of the beauty and diversity of God's creation. Moving beyond apologetics also means moving toward theologies that are written by and for trans people, listening for our unique wisdom and insights, and making changes to church policies and procedures to become more fully inclusive and loving of trans people.

Hartke has some very practical ideas for how faith communities can start doing this work, which he shares in this useful primer on trans Christianity that goes beyond "Gender & Sexuality 101." Weaving biblical examples of gender nonconformity and transformation with the stories and voices of contemporary trans Christians, Hartke's approach is both pastoral and prophetic as he addresses harmful Christian theology that has been used to further marginalize and exclude trans people. Hartke's scriptural basis for a trans-affirming theology



offers a healing balm for queer and trans people who have ever questioned that God loves them based on “what it says in the Bible,” while challenging progressive Christian communities to center trans perspectives in their efforts to become truly open and affirming.

Giving voice to diverse trans people reflecting on their relationships to faith, scripture, and Christian community, Hartke disavows the reader of any preconceived notion of a universal trans experience and reveals the intersections of white supremacy, capitalism, heterosexism, patriarchy, and colonialism that impact each of our lives differently, depending on our relationship to these systems of domination.

As of this writing, at least 12 trans women have been murdered in the U.S. in 2018. The Trump administration recently announced plans to roll back protections for trans prisoners in federal lockup. Many trans people struggle to access basic health care or even public restrooms without fear of violence or harassment. Hartke’s trans-affirming theology couldn’t be timelier for ministry professionals seeking to build beloved community by and for people who have been consistently pushed to the margins.

As a gender-nonconforming queer person and lay minister in Christian communities, I have experienced the liberatory and healing potential of moving beyond apologetics toward a future that recognizes and celebrates each person’s unique gender identity and expression. This liberation is felt not only by queer and trans people in my communities but also by people who identify as cisgender and straight. When queer and trans people are not expected to justify or apologize for our very existence, everyone in the community benefits from a greater freedom to live into the singular and unique person God is calling them to be.

Hartke’s *Transforming* builds the foundation for future trans theologies and provides resources for faith communities to transform themselves into places of healing and liberation for all of God’s people regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. ■

Sarah Pritchard is a dancer, organizer, and co-facilitator of Agape Fellowship community church in Oakland, Calif.

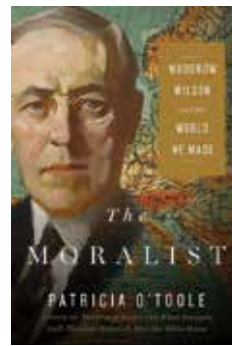
Reviewed by Anne Colamosca

HIGH IDEALS AND POLITICAL REPRESSION

***The Moralist: Woodrow Wilson and the World He Made*, by Patricia O’Toole. Simon & Schuster.**

IN SPRING 1917, as the stark brutality of World War I continued into its fourth year, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson reversed his advocacy for neutrality and declared war on Germany. This controversial decision allowed a financially strapped Britain to hold out against the German onslaught.

As the war ended in November 1918, Wilson, the tight-lipped, egotistical former Princeton University president and governor of New Jersey, emerged as a great hero in Europe. “Thousands ... knelt along railway tracks to offer prayers as he passed,” writes historian Patricia O’Toole in her recently released biography, *The Moralist: Woodrow*



Presbyterianism. “Ultimately, I came to see the moral ideals of President Wilson as more secular than religious,” O’Toole explains, “the effect of his long formal education in history, government, and law.”

Beyond Wilson’s mixed record on international affairs, O’Toole and other historians note far-reaching and progressive legislation passed during

his terms. This includes the Clayton Antitrust Act; a graduated income tax; a mandated eight-hour workday for interstate railroad workers; and, despite Wilson withholding support during his first term, eventual passage of the 19th Amendment, giving many American women the right to vote.

But O’Toole’s canny focus on Wilson’s “moral choices” also underscores the chilling dark side of his legacy—a dark side that reverberates in the early 21st century. “He is still

Woodrow Wilson “repressed dissent more often and more harshly than any other occupant of the White House.”

Wilson and the World He Made. “Wilson ... beamed and bowed and tipped his silk hat times without number.”

Back in the U.S., Wilson was not so popular. His party, the Democrats, lost both houses of Congress. On Oct. 2, 1919, Wilson suffered a paralyzing stroke after a month of travel to build support for the Treaty of Versailles to formally end World War I. It included a provision to create a League of Nations, an international body to negotiate disputes between countries that had been conceived of and championed by Wilson. The treaty was defeated in Congress.

O’Toole, whose biography of Henry Adams (*The Five of Hearts*) was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, frames her newest work around Wilson’s strong emphasis on “moral force.” His view was that “the greatest power of the United States was not its wealth but the moral force of its democracy,” she writes. Surprisingly, she spends little time exploring the effect of Wilson’s deeply rooted

remembered as the president who repressed dissent more often and more harshly than any other occupant of the White House,” O’Toole concludes. Her complex, often riveting narrative includes Wilson’s treacherous curtailment of civil liberties—most often aimed at socialists, immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, and publications that disagreed with his decision to go to war.

Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist Party leader who had run against Wilson for president, was arrested in 1918 and sent to prison for speeches against America’s entry into WWI. After the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the “Red Scare” saw politicians and the press stoking paranoia about a leftist takeover of the U.S. by labor activists, anarchists, and real and perceived “radicals,” especially those who were foreign-born. Bombings, including of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer’s house in 1919 by an Italian anarchist, initiated thousands of investigations of immigrants and many subsequent

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deportations. Vigilante groups—pumped by Washington rhetoric against “aliens”—beat, murdered, and lynched those perceived as un-American or not sufficiently patriotic. Those included African Americans, who were long dismissed by Wilson in what O’Toole describes as an immoral bargain with Southern leaders.

In the end, Wilson conjures up a disturbing double image. He is both a modern, progressive internationalist, a prophet of globalized 21st century America, and a tyrannical racist, deeply uneasy with all who came from racial or national backgrounds outside of his narrowly defined social set.

This is an especially important read in today’s vindictive political climate. O’Toole demonstrates that any president with little self-knowledge and an authoritarian bent can corrode the country’s rule of law and sense of democracy if no one acts. ■

Anne Colamosca is a former staff writer at Business Week and has written for many national magazines and newspapers.

Reviewed by Kelley Burd-Huss

DISMANTLING MOUNTAIN MYTHS

What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia, by Elizabeth Catte. Belt Publishing.

ELIZABETH CATTE’S *What You Are Getting Wrong About Appalachia* is the vindication every Appalachian has been craving in the wake of the media’s seemingly endless examination of so-called “Trump Country.” For any native Appalachian like me, reading this slim volume is at once a breath of fresh air and the blueprint you always wished for to respond when someone snidely expresses surprise that you have all your teeth and a good pair of shoes.

Catte divides her book into three sections. First, she provides an overview of why Appalachia is more diverse and less monolithically conservative than the media has portrayed. Second, Catte offers a direct refute to the Trump Country literary genre. The author concludes her work with a powerful description of her Appalachian home’s core values, contrasting Appalachians’

longstanding commitments to social justice and cohesive community against outsiders’ efforts to both “save” the region’s people and extract its resources without just compensation or stewardship.

Catte frankly describes her mission in writing this book as providing “critical commentary about who benefits from the omission of [diverse Appalachian] voices ... and openly celebrat[ing] the lives, actions, and legacies of those ignored in popular commentary about Appalachia.” Though Catte powerfully delivers information supporting both objectives, many commentators construct a feud between Catte and J.D. Vance, author of the blockbuster book *Hillbilly Elegy*. Catte critiques *Elegy* for universalizing his Appalachian experience and framing Appalachia as an American “other” while using an enduring myth about race to paint Appalachians of all backgrounds as inferior to those living outside the region. (For a quick overview of this myth, check out Michael Harriot’s “When the Irish Weren’t White” on The Root.)

Reducing Appalachia to a literary feud tragically obscures the timeliness and poignancy of Catte’s core argument. Though Catte spends a significant portion of the book constructing a counter-image of Appalachia and its people, the book’s most important takeaway is its discussion of how Americans in power construct and propagate false images of the “other,” dividing marginalized populations against each other and disrupting our ability to create a society committed to the common good. In this way, Appalachia can serve as an illustrative companion to contemporary volumes in theology and Christian-informed social analysis, such as Will Willimon’s *Fear of the Other* and Brené Brown’s *Braving the Wilderness*.

To a native Appalachian now living in a large, distant city, the book is an appetizer to a main course of telling Appalachia’s true and diverse history and contextualizing it within a faith-based framework. To those who have not deeply considered the region, however, the book’s arguments bring a jarring reality check to what it means to be marginalized in the U.S. and how the face of marginalization may be more diverse than once thought. ■

Kelley Burd-Huss is a West Virginia-raised and -educated writer and attorney.

Reviewed by David Ensign

A DIFFERENT DIVINE COMEDY

God, Improv, and the Art of Living, by MaryAnn McKibben Dana.
Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

THE DAY AFTER the 2016 election, I joined my weekly improv-for-clergy workshop. We were a small group of progressive pastors still in shock. It might be more accurate to say we were still in denial. The election had given us President Donald Trump, and we wanted to scream, “No!”

Though most of us were novices, we knew the first rule of improv comedy: “Yes, and.” You accept what someone else says and build on it. Improv is impossible without “Yes.”

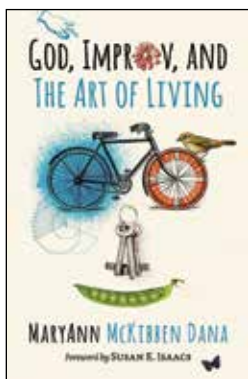
Our teacher asked us, “Would you rather process the election or play?” We were unanimous, albeit

tepid, in choosing to play. Laughter seemed the best medicine for shared distress if midday whiskey or a four-year nap were not options. We entered the play of improv that afternoon, testing the art’s fundamental stance captured in the rule of “Yes.” How could we say “Yes” when from our core we wanted to scream “No”?

MaryAnn McKibben Dana, who participated in that group while researching *God, Improv, and the Art of Living*, reminds us, “We are not in control of our lives. But we can choose Yes.”

Choosing “Yes” lies at the heart of resistance, and thus the insights and practices of improv have a great deal to offer both to activism and to keeping faith through these days when affronts to human dignity and assaults on democracy come faster than laugh lines at a Second City performance.

God, Improv, and the Art of Living is a timely and provocative guide for living in the time of Trump. Divided into seven sections, the book explores principles of improv, how they can be lived out day-to-day, and where they are evident in stories of Christian faith. Each section includes several chapters fleshing out the principles both in contemporary



“We meet an improvising God constantly in scripture.”

life and in scripture.

Along the way, McKibben Dana uses descriptions of improv games that bring to light group dynamics or individual habits of mind. An appendix includes more than 20 pages of meditations and games for individuals and groups to explore how the principles of improv can help move us through challenging circumstances.

McKibben Dana also invites us to reconsider core theological convictions. Noting that church has traditionally used words such as “immutable” and “infallible” to describe God, she invites readers to consider

an improvising God. She writes, “We meet an improvising God constantly in scripture. God experiments, changes God’s mind, and works in partnership with God’s people to bring about the Yes that’s at the heart of improv—and also the gospel.”

Though God may collaborate with God’s people in an improvisational fashion, McKibben Dana insists that the collaboration and improvisation move “in the direction of inclusion and mercy and grace.” In other words, God works with God’s people within the framework of God’s love.

Perhaps the resurrection was not an omniscient God’s plan for salvation but rather an improvising God’s anguished “Yes, and.” Yes, you may hate my beloved, you may even crucify him, and love will still have the final word. That is precisely the improvising God we need for the times we have been given.

God, Improv, and the Art of Living is an excellent guidebook for that holy collaboration. ■

David Ensign is a writer, filmmaker, and part-time pastor at Clarendon Presbyterian Church in Arlington, Va.



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Caught Up in Love

THIS MONTH WE HEAR ABOUT God's alluring wisdom, personified as the ultimate hostess, who invites us to a banquet in her glorious home with its seven pillars. The passage from Proverbs 9 always reminds me of an unforgettable moment in Lawrence of Arabia's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Once when he was in the desert, taking water from a spring, Lawrence saw coming toward him "a grey-bearded, ragged man, with a hewn face of great power and weariness." When this man drew near the spring, he shut his eyes and then groaned aloud, "The love is from God; and of God; and toward God."

This pronouncement would be a perfect summation of the "mystical core of the gospel," worth holding in our hearts as we hear about Jesus as the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Other scriptures will speak of the endemic folly that disconnects people from this love, of the new patterns of behavior that stem from

embracing the saving love of God that reaches into our predicament to liberate us through Christ. It can remind us that the complaining pitilessly recorded in the Exodus narratives and the hostile reception to Jesus' claim to be the authentic food and drink from God really stem from our fear of true intimacy with God, fear of becoming caught up in the love that is of God and returns to God with and in Christ.

Martin L. Smith, an Episcopal priest, is an author, preacher, and retreat leader. He lives in Washington, D.C.



[AUGUST 5]

A Satanic Cloud

Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

THE TENDENCY OF churches to make our worship "lite" in the summer becomes harder to justify this Sunday. We worship under the cloud of the anniversary of the U.S. bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, on Aug. 6, 1945, the horror that ushered in our nuclear age. We have gotten used to our "sane" leaders coolly considering the conditions in which they would unleash weapons that could make our—God's—earth uninhabitable. Ours is a self-imposed wilderness exile in which, for those who are brave enough to look up, this lurid, satanic pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night continually looms ahead, drawing us toward self-destruction.

The readings, with their theme of manna in the wilderness, recover their proper urgency under this cloud. God has no intention of merely giving us miraculous rations of grace to keep us going while nothing really changes. The bread that God sends is not a substance but a person, the Son, embodying God's power to change, incarnating a way of

being human that makes peace possible in the face of the apparent hopelessness of humanity's suicidal predicament. "The bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world ... I am the bread of life" (John 6:33, 35).

In the reading from Ephesians, we are called to the arduous task of maturity. God's liberating action to bring us out of

The Spirit empowers us to pioneer a new way of being community.

our wilderness works through a church that is emphatically not meant to be merely "an institution with a message," but a living organism, a pioneering community, that puts the new way of mutuality and compassion into practice as Christ's body, continually being stretched by the Spirit to attain "maturity, the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13).

[AUGUST 12]

Restless Whining

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8; Ephesians 4:25 - 5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

"DO NOT COMPLAIN among yourselves," Jesus says in John's gospel. "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (6:43-44). The Exodus traditions about the complaints of the people of Israel over the meager fare available in the desert provide the background for John's probing of human resistance to God. The original manna came as a response to the people's whining and their nostalgic preference for the lovely food they had enjoyed as slaves that seemed, in retrospect, to make slavery preferable to the hardships of the desert. How much more likely then that the visitation of the authentic bread of heaven in the person of the son sent from God would provoke complaints, given the inveterate and bitterly ironic resistance of the broken human heart to the very means that God provides for nourishment and healing!

How does God overcome this resistance? Not by the fire of punishment: that had proved ineffectual in the original exodus. John's answer is by the divine power of attraction to the person of the son, the embodiment of divine self-giving. The "drawing" of God is the leitmotif, the dominant theme, of the fourth gospel. "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). There can be no force-feeding; the encounter with Christ, the bread of life, has to be a "coming," a willing yielding to God's magnetic attraction to eternal life, a surrender to the invitation that we find in today's psalm, "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (34:8).

The writer to the Ephesians puts a finger on whining as a symptom of the necessarily restless state of human beings locked into the state of rivalry, envy, and egotistical entitlement. The urgency of his injunctions to practice mutual forbearance and compassion and the costly sharing of power does not stem from an overheated moralism, but trust in our baptismal transformation, being "marked with a seal for the day of redemption" (4:30). Our determination to counteract "bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling" (verse 31) stems from our

baptismal confidence. The Spirit empowers us to pioneer a new way of being together in community, the actual promised land we can enter through God's new exodus liberation in Christ.

[AUGUST 19]

Sober Inebriation?

Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14;
Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

PIONEERS OF early Christian spirituality adopted a paradoxical expression from contemporary Jewish philosophy and mysticism that summed up the experience of authentic spiritual joy: “sober inebriation.” When our hearts resonate with the joy of God we experience bliss, but not as a “trip” that disconnects us from reality. God's joy grounds us more deeply in truth and insight. Israel's sages had long played with this imagery, as we see in Proverbs. Here God's wisdom is personified as an alluring hostess—and architect of her own mansion with its seven splendid pillars!—issuing a free invitation to her banquet: “To those without sense she says, ‘Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight’” (Proverbs 9:4-6).

Our reading from Ephesians takes up this rich experiential wisdom tradition: “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people, but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil” (5:15-16). Here wisdom takes its eschatological stance. Our wisdom in Christ takes the form of sober vigilance, fortifying us to resist the forces that blight human flourishing. Instead of taking an escape route from reality through bingeing, we commit to wakefulness, and enjoy authentic exhilaration in worship and song. The current lingo of being “woke” neatly captures the theme. Eastern Christian spirituality called it *nepsis* (awakeness), the state of being alert and mindful, a gentle resistance to the addictions that compromise our God-given freedom.

The theme of the authentic food and wine of God is at the heart the sixth chapter of John's gospel: “My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (verses 55-56). Our ultimate



City of Florence

nourishment consists in a sustained personal intimacy and mutual indwelling with Christ in which we share now in the life-fullness of God that makes death powerless—the mystical core of the gospel!

[AUGUST 26]

How Do We Abide?

Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18; Psalm 34:15-22;
Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

SCHOLARS SUGGEST that John 6 makes subtle references to traumatic conflicts undergone by the communities associated with “the disciple whom Jesus loved” in the 25 years following the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. Eventually, followers of Jesus were ejected from their synagogues as Jewish identity began to be redefined. The protests lodged against Jesus' proclamations about the necessity of eating his flesh and drinking his blood almost certainly hint at

We are called to the arduous task of maturity.

bitter disputes about Communion practiced by Jewish followers of Jesus in their homes. These rituals were probably deemed intolerably offensive to a coalescing Judaism. The churches lost members in the disputes and had to adapt to internal exile within their neighborhoods once they were banned from the synagogues.

The gospel addresses the vulnerability of those who persisted in abiding in

Christ and deepening their commitment to Communion. “Because of this, many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So, Jesus asked the 12, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life?’” (John 6:66-68). We may even find hints that among the “remaining Christians” were some who had doubled down on the language of eating Christ's body and blood, making the ritual almost magical and literalistic. The gospel warns them and us that there is nothing magical at all about what came to be called sacraments. The *meaning* is what is all important: “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life,” Jesus says (6:63).

Ephesians' teaching about putting on “the whole armor of God” may remind us of awful stained-glass windows of Christian “knights in shining armor” and individualistic moralizing about defending ourselves from worldliness. Let us be willing to heed the reminder that to actually resist the “principalities and powers”—those larger-than-human forces that systemically pervert our cultures and institutions—it is not enough to imagine that we are immune from their power. Only actual spiritual practices, which counteract their influence, have any value in sustaining our distinct identity as members of Christ's body and pioneers of God's future. ■

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

Driving to the Future (Without Signaling)

WALKING INTO my house after another exhausting day in the Fields of the Lord—I had to work, like, six hours straight in an air-conditioned office, with only a couple hours for lunch!—I encountered the usual pile of mail on the floor, below the door slot, and underneath the cat who doesn't move until the door squeezes him into the radiator. (Another window into my world. You're welcome.)

Picking up the pile I noticed a letter from my car insurance company. Most correspondence I receive on this topic rudely accuses me of "paying too much!" (How do they know?), but then offers to correct that error in a mere "15 minutes of your time, because you can't afford not to!" And that's just on the *outside* of the envelope.

But this envelope was unmarked—no italicized words of condescension or false promises to trigger an immediate toss into the recycling bin. It was a plain envelope portending—as plain envelopes do—ominous content, such as a legal summons for some unknown transgression that I'm sure was unintentional, plus I swear I wasn't even there when it happened!

But then I opened it: "Because of your history of good driving," the letter began, "your next accident is on us."

Say what?

My insurance company was, in effect, telling me that I can just get in my car and crumple, bend, or otherwise crunch another car and it's cool with them. And they won't think less of me, or raise my rates! This, to an aging driver with weakening eyesight, slowing reaction time, and a growing bitterness watching young people laughing over their craft beers and welcoming a future filled



with medical advancements too late to benefit me. A man filled with a growing rage that can now be taken out ... on the road?!

Sweet.

I won't state which insurance company it is, because they don't need free publicity. (They want an ad, they can buy an ad.) I *will* clarify that, even though I'm progressive, it's not that one. Nor am I "in good hands," which always sounded kind of creepy. Whether a small, foreign-born talking lizard is involved, I won't say. But I digress.

WHAT CAN I do with this new opportunity, this new power!? Up to now, when conveying a needed corrective to bad drivers, I've been limited to methods with only marginal effect. Honking, for example, when telegraphing my displeasure at another driver's rudeness. Or gesturing in a futile but elaborate pantomime to scold a driver refusing to pull fully into the intersection when turning left, making me miss the light. (And if they do that when it turns green, will I miss the light again? Will I be stuck there for hours, for days, slowly dehydrating as young people on bicycles pass by, laughing in a carefree manner?)

But now, according to my insurance company, I can take more punitive actions. I can simply push a recalcitrant driver from behind, shoving a car into the proper

position when turning, or nudge it from the side. They might lose a rearview mirror in the process, or the ability to open a passenger door until it's repaired by the body shop. But not to worry. I'm covered.

Or if a driver yells at me for having my turn signal on for the last 10 blocks—my God-given right as an elderly driver—I can simply fish-tail my car into their rear fender as they pass. Oops. Happy to exchange insurance information.

Or (you thought I was finished?) instead of leaving an angry note on a car taking up two parking spaces at the gun show, I can just back into it so hard the trunk pops open. (Dude, what's with the three cases of Diet Dr Pepper?)

In short, I can make an impression, literally, because I'm filled with righteous indentation. I am Road Warrior. The Punisher. Judge, Jury, and that other thing. And what better time than now, when I was wearying of the impotence of my current role—Highway Geezer, a driver who has much to teach but no authority to do so.

But should I use this new force myself, or save it for future generations? Could I pass it on to one of my adult children, to whom fate has already dealt more than their share of vehicle incidents that were "totally not our fault!"? Or could I bequeath it to my granddaughter, who can use it when she sideswipes several parked cars while excitedly texting that she passed her driver's test?

Nah. I'm using it myself.

HEY, THAT GUY with the "How's my driving?" bumper sticker just cut me off!

Well, I'll tell you how's your driving. In fact, let me show you ... ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

A close-up photograph of three hands of different skin tones cupped together, holding a small, red, fabric-like heart with a blue embroidered border. The hands are positioned in the left and center of the frame, with the heart resting in the palms. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

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For years you have sojourned with us—calling us to act, funding our work with your generous contributions, and inspiring us to hope.

By investing in our mission, you have become a faithful witness for social change. We rely on the financial support of our beloved community, and with each contribution you have further equipped us to speak out for what is just and take a stand against that which is not. Thank you!

The future is unpredictable, but we know the mission of Sojourners will always be imperative. Our work is far from over, and we need your continued support. Share your faith beyond your lifetime by including Sojourners in your estate plans. Just one planned gift can help us continue our missional work during difficult economic times.

Contact Feriel Ricks at legacy@sojo.net or 202-745-4645 to learn more about how you can leave a legacy of hope for years to come.

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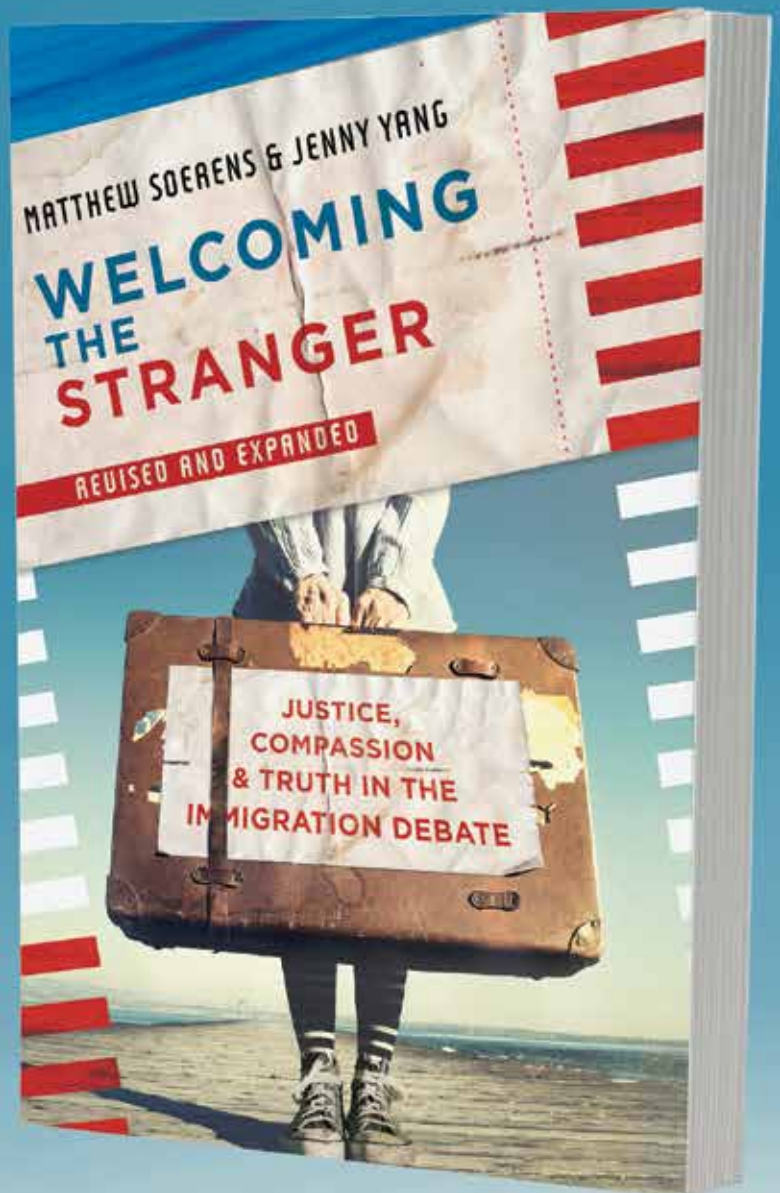
ARE WE MISSING JESUS' CALL TO LOVE?

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NOEL CASTELLANOS,

president of the Christian Community Development Association

World Relief staffers Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang move beyond the rhetoric to offer a Christian response to immigration. With careful historical understanding and thoughtful policy analysis, they **debunk myths** about immigration, show the **limits of the current immigration system**, and offer concrete ways for you to **welcome and minister to your immigrant neighbors**.



Matthew Soerens is the US director of church mobilization for World Relief and the national coordinator of the Evangelical Immigration Table.



Jenny Yang is the senior vice president of advocacy and policy for World Relief.